

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Part 1: Introduction

(No. 1119.1 – 8/17/16 – NLC)

I. BACKGROUND

- A. The book of Acts is sometimes referred to as “The Acts of the Apostles;” some have argued that it is more accurately called “The Acts of Jesus” or “The Acts of the Holy Spirit.” In any event, it documents a wide array of actual events: a continuation of all that Jesus began to do while here on earth; acts of the Holy Spirit; acts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers & believers; acts of the church.
- B. Many Christian denominations in the world today do not believe the book of Acts is for today—they teach that it was only a transitional book until the rest of the New Testament was written and that there are no more apostles or miracles today.
- C. NOTE: If there are no more apostles or miracles, I quit! We are helpless and hopeless in trying to win the lost and preach the kingdom of God without the same power and miracles the early church had!
- D. **Acts 1:1-8:** *¹In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ²until the day He was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles He had chosen. ³After 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. ⁴On 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. ⁵For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” ⁶So when they met together, they asked Him, “Lord, are You at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

E. Luke the Author

1. Although Luke's name is never mentioned in Acts, the similar style and opening address to Theophilus strongly suggest that it is a continuation of Luke's gospel.
 - a) **Luke 1:1-4:** *¹Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, ²just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. ³Therefore, 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,** ⁴so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.*
 - b) **Acts 1:1:** *In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach.*
2. Acts 1 begins right where Luke 24 ended:
 - a) **Luke 24:49:** *"I am going to send you what My Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."*
 - b) **Acts 1:4:** *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. ⁵For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."*
 - c) Acts continues to expand on what "Jesus **began** to do and teach" in Luke's gospel.

3. Luke the physician

- a) **Col. 4:14:** *Our dear friend Luke, the **doctor** ["physician" – KJV], and Demas send greetings.*
- b) In both Luke's gospel and Acts, his vocabulary, careful investigation, and attention to detail confirm the fact that he was a physician; for instance, in Acts 28:6, the writer uses the Greek medical term *pimpremi* for "swell up," a word found nowhere else in the New Testament which literally means "inflammation."

4. Luke, Paul's companion

- a) In certain sections of Acts, the writer uses the pronoun "we," indicating that he was present as an eyewitness for those events.
- b) Examples: Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16.

F. Date of writing

1. Most historians date the writing at A.D. 63 [see *Section II.D: Timeline of New Testament History* on p.293].
2. The book ends with Paul's 2-year house arrest in Rome, making no mention of his (and Peter's) martyrdom in A.D. 67 or 68 and the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.
3. Covers the first 30 years of church history;

II. MAJOR THEMES & PURPOSE

- A. Resurrection & exaltation of Jesus Christ the Lord
- B. Ministry of the Holy Spirit
- C. Birth, growth & triumph of the church (in the face of opposition & persecution)
- D. Jews & Gentiles becoming one through a New Covenant of grace
- E. Acts is like a bridge between the 4 gospels and the apostolic letters—it gives invaluable insight into the life and ministry of Paul & important historical background of a number of the churches he addresses in his epistles

III. BASIC OUTLINE (1:8)

Acts 1:8 gives a geographical outline & timeline for the entire book: You will be My witnesses in **Jerusalem**, and in all **Judea and Samaria**, and to the **ends of the earth**."

- A. Jerusalem (chs. 1-7)
- B. Judea & Samaria (chs. 8-9)
- C. Ends of the earth—Caesarea, Antioch, Asia Minor, Greece, & Rome (chs. 10-28)
- D. The book of Acts can also be subdivided into 2 main sections:
 1. Peter's apostolic ministry in the Holy Land (chs. 1-12)
 2. Paul's apostolic ministry to the Gentile world (chs. 13-28)

IV. GOALS OF THIS STUDY

- A. To learn the history of the early church so that we can gain an understanding of the principles that should guide in the formation & governing of the church in succeeding times
- B. To understand the work of the Holy Spirit in the church
- C. To receive power & boldness through a Spirit-filled life
- D. To see what a real church looks like (and doesn't!)
- E. To be challenged & motivated to continue the work of spreading the gospel “to the ends of the earth”
- F. To see the triumph of the gospel in the face of persecution
- G. To stir our hearts to pray: “Lord, restore the modern church to the apostolic power & authority seen in the book of Acts...”
Or, as Elisha prayed in 2 Kings 2:14 after picking up the mantle of Elijah: “Where now is the LORD, the God of Elijah?”

V. CONCLUSION

- A. In subsequent studies, we will examine the book of Acts one section at a time, while being careful to point out major themes along the way and to keep the “big picture” ever before us—that we are empowered by the same Holy Spirit today to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth; Acts chapters 29, 30, 31, etc. are being “written” through our lives now!
- B. Here is our **Study Outline** for this 12-part series:
 - 1. *Part 1 – Introduction* (this study)
 - 2. *Part 2 – Waiting for the Promise* (ch. 1)
 - 3. *Part 3 – Pentecost & the Birth of the Church* (ch. 2)
 - 4. *Part 4 – Growth of the Jerusalem Church* (chs. 3-5)
 - 5. *Part 5 – Choosing the Seven* (chs. 6-7)
 - 6. *Part 6 – Gospel Advances to Judea & Samaria* (chs. 8-9)
 - 7. *Part 7 – Gentile Church is Born* (chs. 10-12)
 - 8. *Part 8 – Paul’s 1st Missionary Journey & Jerusalem Council* (chs. 13-15)
 - 9. *Part 9 – Paul’s 2nd Missionary Journey* (15:40-18:22)
 - 10. *Part 10 – Paul’s 3rd Missionary Journey* (18:23-21:16)
 - 11. *Part 11 – Paul’s Arrest, Trials, & Voyage to Rome* (21:17-ch.28)
 - 12. *Part 12 – Conclusion*

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Part 2: Waiting for the Promise (ch. 1)

(No. 1119.2 – 8/31/16 – NLC)

I. CHRIST'S RESURRECTION MINISTRY & ASCENSION

Acts 1:1-11: ¹In my former book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ²until the day He was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles He had chosen. ³After 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. ⁴On 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. ⁵For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” ⁶So when they met together, they asked Him, “Lord, are You at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” ⁹After He said this, He was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid Him from their sight. ¹⁰They were looking intently up into the sky as He was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹“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.”

A. Jesus **began** to do and teach (v.2) – He would continue His work for 40 days & then through the Holy Spirit and His Body.

1. **“Do and teach”** (in that order!); we must *be* the message; our preaching must first be lived. If we try to teach/preach things we haven't yet lived, we will bring death to the hearers; the letter without the Spirit kills, and we, like Peter, will use our sword (the Word) to hack people's ears (their ability to hear) off!
2. **1 Tim. 4:16: Watch your life and doctrine closely.**
Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.
3. **“Prayer and ministry”** (Acts 6:4 – in that order!);

- B. There is special emphasis throughout the book of Acts on the **apostolic life and ministry**—the risen Christ spent these 40 days specifically with “the apostles He had chosen” (v.2), giving them instructions, etc.
1. This is the reason the book has traditionally been called “The Acts of the Apostles.”
 2. The word “apostles” is found 33 times in Acts; [Gk. *apostolos* = a delegate or ambassador of Christ (with miraculous powers); a messenger (2 Cor. 8:23); one who is set apart and sent out;” see Mat. 10:2].
 3. Apostles are “**sent ones**”—sent by Jesus the way He was sent by His Father:
 - a) **John 20:21:** *Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you.”* NOTE: (Jesus is the “**Apostle** and High Priest of our confession” – Heb. 3:1 NAS, indicating that He wants all of us to share in His priestly and apostolic life).
 - b) **Mark 3:13-15:** ¹³*Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to Him those He wanted, and they came to Him. ¹⁴He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might **be with Him** and that He might **send them out to preach** ¹⁵and to have authority to drive out demons.*
 - c) How were they sent? They came to Him and spent time with Him first—then they were sent out later; the Twelve had been with Him for 3½ years; Paul spent his first 3 years in the desert, and his final 4 years in prison!
 - d) **Rom. 10:13-15:** ¹³*For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” ¹⁴How, then, can they call on the One they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the One of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵And **how can they preach unless they are sent?** As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”*
 4. God appointed apostles first in the church
 - a) **1 Cor. 12:28:** *And in the church **God has appointed first of all apostles**, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing,*

those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.

- b) **Eph. 4:11-12:** ¹¹*It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹²to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...*
5. Apostles, together with prophets, lay and form the very foundation of the church:
- a) **Eph. 2:19-20:** ¹⁹*Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone.*
 - b) **1 Cor. 3:9-11:** ⁹*For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. ¹⁰By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. ¹¹For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.*
 - c) All of the churches in Acts were founded by apostles; even Samaria was founded, not by Philip the evangelist, but rather when Peter and John were sent from Jerusalem (Acts 8:14-17).
6. Apostles are given special revelation in the mystery of Christ and the gospel and their ministry is to establish the church in sound teaching or doctrine:
- a) **Eph. 3:4-5:** ⁴*In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.*
 - b) **Acts 2:42:** *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

- C. He gave the apostles many **convincing proofs** that He was alive (v.3)
1. AMP: “He showed Himself alive... by [a series of] many convincing demonstrations [unquestionable evidences and infallible proofs].”
 2. After His resurrection, Jesus made numerous bodily appearances over a period of 40 days—first to Mary Magdalene (Mat. 28:1-9), then to the 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), then to Simon Peter (Luke 24:34), then to 10 of the disciples, Thomas being absent (Luke 24:36; John 20:19); then to the 11, Thomas being present (John 20:26); He then appeared to 7 of the apostles fishing at the Sea of Tiberias (John 21:4), to over 500 eyewitnesses (1 Cor. 15:6), to James (1 Cor. 15:7), and finally with all of the disciples when they were all assembled together at Bethany just before His ascension (Luke 24:50; Acts 1:9-11);
 3. Jesus walked through walls & showed them His wounds (John 20:19-20, 26-29);
 4. He broke bread & ate fish with His disciples, then disappeared (Luke 24:30-35, 41-43); John 21:9-14);
 5. He gave the disciples a supernatural catch of fish (John 21:5-6);
- D. Christ’s resurrection is a very important theme throughout Acts
1. **Acts 1:22:** *Beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.*
 2. **Acts 2:31:** *Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the **resurrection of the Christ**, that He was not abandoned to the grave, nor did His body see decay.*
 3. **Acts 4:2:** *They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the **resurrection of the dead**.*
 4. **Acts 4:33:** *With great power the apostles continued to testify to the **resurrection of the Lord Jesus**, and much grace was upon them all.*
 5. **Acts 17:18:** *A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, “What is this*

*babbler trying to say?” Others remarked, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods.” They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the **resurrection**.*

6. **Acts 17:32:** *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.”*
7. **Acts 23:6, 8:** *⁶Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, “My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the **resurrection of the dead...**”⁸(The Sadducees say that there is no **resurrection**, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.)*
8. **Acts 24:15:** *And I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be **a resurrection** of both the righteous and the wicked.*
9. **Acts 24:21:** *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.”*
10. Paul would later emphasize the centrality of Christ’s resurrection to the whole gospel message:

1 Cor. 15:12-18: *¹²But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ¹⁵More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that He raised Christ from the dead. But He did not raise Him if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.*

E. Jesus gave a 40-day seminar on “the **kingdom of God**” (v.3)
Acts starts & ends on this note (see Acts 28:31)

1. **Acts 8:12:** *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.

2. **Acts 14:22:** *Strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the **kingdom of God**,” they said.*
3. **Acts 19:8:** *Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the **kingdom of God**.*
4. **Acts 20:25:** [Paul]: *“Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about **preaching the kingdom** will ever see me again.”*
5. **Acts 28:23:** *They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the **kingdom of God** and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.*
6. **Acts 28:31:** *Boldly and without hindrance he [Paul] **preached the kingdom of God** and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.*

- F. But they got politics (Israel) confused with the Kingdom (as we sometimes do)! They were looking for the deliverance of the people of Israel from foreign (Roman) domination and the establishment of an earthly kingdom:

Acts 1:6-7: *“So when they met together, they asked Him, “Lord, are You **at this time** going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”⁷ He said to them: “It is not for you to know the **times or dates the Father has set** by His own authority.*

1. **John 18:36:** *Jesus said, “**My kingdom is not of this world**. If it were, My servants would fight to prevent My arrest by the Jews. But now My kingdom is from another place.”*
2. God will restore the kingdom to Israel during the Millennium—Jesus was simply telling them that those were future events controlled by the Sovereign God. God has *not* given up on Israel (Romans 11), and as we will see, for the first 8-10 years, the early church was a Jewish church in Jerusalem—they, not the Sanhedrin, were the new authority on earth!

3. God has set (lit. “fixed, prearranged”) times for each nation (including Israel), as Paul would later explain to the Athenians:

Acts 17:26-27: ²⁶*From one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.* ²⁷*God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.*

G. The Gift, the Promise, the **Baptism of the Spirit** (vv.4-5)

1. **John 14:26:** *But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*
2. **John 15:26-27:** ²⁶*When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, He will testify about Me.* ²⁷*And you also must testify, for you have been with Me from the beginning.*
 - a) “Testify” [Gk. *martureo* = “from *martus*; to be a witness”];
 - b) [See *Section I.I Witnesses (of His resurrection)* on p.12] – it was the promised Holy Spirit that would enable them to be Christ’s witnesses.
3. **John 16:7-15:** ⁷*But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.* ⁸*When He comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹in regard to sin, because men do not believe in Me; ¹⁰in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see Me no longer; ¹¹and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. ¹²I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. ¹³But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴He will bring glory to Me by taking from what is Mine and making it known to you. ¹⁵All that belongs to the Father is Mine. That*

*is why I said **the Spirit will take from what is Mine and make it known to you.***

H. WAIT (Luke 24 – until endued with power) “for a few days” (v.5) – can’t accomplish the mission without power

1. **Luke 24:46-49:** ⁴⁶*He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹I am going to send you what My Father has promised; but **stay** [Gk. “sit down”] **in the city until you have been clothed** [“endued” – KJV] **with power from on high.**”*
2. “Clothed” [Gk. *enduo* = “sinking into a garment; to invest with clothing; clothe (with), endue, have (put) on”];
3. “Power” [Gk. *dunamis* = “miraculous power;” from which words like “dynamic” and “dynamo” are derived];

I. **Witnesses** (of His resurrection)

1. Power was coming through the Holy Spirit to make them His “*witnesses* in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8)—they would be testifying as eyewitnesses in court to the facts they had seen and heard.
2. “Witness” [Gk. *martus* = “a witness; by analogy a ‘martyr;’” see note on John 15:26-27, *Section I.G.2* on p.11]; found in the following verses:
 - a) **Luke 24:46-48:** ⁴⁶*He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸**You are witnesses** of these things.”*
 - b) **Acts 1:22:** *Beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a **witness** with us of His resurrection.*
 - c) **Acts 2:32:** [Peter]: *God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all **witnesses** of the fact.*
 - d) **Acts 3:15:** [Peter]: *You killed the author of life, but God raised Him from the dead. We are **witnesses** of this.*

- e) **Acts 5:32:** [Peter]: *We are **witnesses** of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.*
 - f) **Acts 10:39-41:** [Peter at Cornelius' house]: ³⁹*We are **witnesses** of everything He did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed Him by hanging Him on a tree, ⁴⁰but God raised Him from the dead on the third day and caused Him to be seen. ⁴¹He was not seen by all the people, but by **witnesses** whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead.*
 - g) **Acts 13:30-31:** [Paul in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch]: ³⁰*But God raised Him from the dead, ³¹and for many days He was seen by those who had traveled with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now His **witnesses** to our people.*
 - h) **Acts 22:15:** [Ananias to Paul]: *You will be His **witness** to all men of what you have seen and heard.*
 - i) ****Acts 22:20:** [Paul's testimony]: *And when the blood of your **martyr** Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.*
 - j) **Acts 26:16:** [Jesus to Paul]: *Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a **witness** of what you have seen of me and what I will show you.*
- J. Ascension: Jesus “taken up” & His 2nd coming promised (vv.9-11)
1. Acts continues from where the story ended in Luke's gospel—Christ's ascension (right after “power” in v.8):
Luke 24:50-53: ⁵⁰*When He had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, He lifted up His hands and blessed them. ⁵¹While He was blessing them, He left them and was **taken up into heaven.** ⁵²Then they worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ⁵³And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.*
 2. The “two men dressed in white” are presumed to be angels, possibly the same two mentioned in Luke's gospel (see Luke 24:4; also John 20:12, Mat. 28:5)

3. “This same Jesus **will come back** in the same way (in a cloud)”
 - a) **Luke 21:27**: *At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.*
 - b) **John 14:3**: *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am.*

II. WAITING FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 1:12-14: ¹²*Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. ¹³When 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. ¹⁴They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.*

- A. “They returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the **Mount of Olives**. (v.12)
 1. Mount of Olives – olives grown here were crushed to give oil used for the anointing oil (see 1 Sam. 16:13; 1 John 2:27) and to burn in the lamps of the temple (see Lev. 24:2-4);
 2. Olive oil speaks of the Holy Spirit that was about to anoint all of them on the day of Pentecost!
- B. They (120 believers, v.15) “joined together” [Gk. *homothumadon* = “with one accord; lit. together with one passion”]— there was complete harmony of their views and feelings—no schisms, no divided interests, no discordant purposes; (found also in Acts 1:14; 2:1, 46; 4:24; 5:12; 7:57; 8:6; 12:20; 15:25; 18:12; 19:29);
- C. “Constantly in **prayer**” – steadfast, devoted, earnest, persevering prayer!
 1. **Prayer** is how the church began
 2. Prayer is mentioned 32 times in the 28 chapters of Acts (1:14, 24; 2:42; 3:1; 4:24, 31; 6:4, 6; 7:59; 8:15, 22; 9:11,

40; 10:2, 4, 9, 30-31; 11:5; 12:5, 12; 13:3; 14:23; 16:13, 16, 25; 20:36; 21:5; 22:17; 26:29; 27:29; 28:8)

D. Gathered with the disciples were certain unnamed women (probably those who had followed Jesus), also Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brothers (v.14)

1. This is the last mention of Mary by name in the New Testament—without doubt, “a silent protest against “Mary worship.” The disciples were not praying *to* her, but *with* her—she was waiting with them to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit & she became a Pentecostal!
2. Mary here is called “the mother of Jesus” but not “the mother of God.” Jesus is the name of our Lord in His humanity. Since, as man, He was born of Mary, it is proper that she should be called the mother of Jesus. But never in the Bible is she called “the mother of God.” Although Jesus Christ is truly God, it is doctrinally inaccurate and absurd to speak of God as having a human mother. As God, He existed from all eternity.
3. The mention of the brothers of Jesus, coming after the reference to Mary, makes it likely that these were actual sons of Mary and half-brothers of Jesus. Several other verses refute the idea that Mary was a perpetual virgin and never bore any children after the birth of Jesus (see Mat.12:46; Mark 6:3; John 7:3-5; 1 Cor. 9:5; Gal. 1:19).

E. During those **10 days of waiting and praying** in the upper room, there must have been a lot of tears, confessions, and reconciliations.

1. Jesus’s brothers who were there had mocked Him 6 months earlier.
2. Maybe Peter or others confessed their failures before Jesus went to the cross—we just don’t know all that transpired in those 10 long days of waiting.
3. If we are going to see the power come down like it did on the day of Pentecost, we need to put things right—they were finally in one accord!

III. MATTHIAS CHOSEN TO REPLACE JUDAS

Acts 1:15-26: ¹⁵In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) ¹⁶and said, “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus— ¹⁷he was one of our number and shared in this ministry.” ¹⁸(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. ¹⁹Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) ²⁰“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.’

²¹Therefore 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, ²²beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” ²³So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. ²⁴Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two You have chosen ²⁵to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.” ²⁶Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

A. This is the first of many **speeches** recorded in the book of Acts (vv.15-22)—it is one (deliberative) of four main types of speeches we will be studying:

1. Evangelistic – 2 types: to Jews & God-fearing people (Acts 2:14-40; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 5:29-32; 10:34-43; 13:16-41), and to pagans (Acts 17:22-31)
2. Deliberative (Acts 1:15-22; 15:7-21)
3. Apologetic (Acts 7:2-52; 22:1-21; 23:1-6; 24:10-21; 25:8-10; 26:2-23; 28:17-28)
4. Exhortation (Acts 20:18-35)

B. “The **believers** (a group numbering **about a hundred and twenty...**” (v.15)

1. At the onset, God’s work often seems small, as was the case with the rebuilding of the temple during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah; but the Lord warned them through the prophet Zechariah:

Zech. 4:10 (MSG): *Does anyone dare despise this **day of small beginnings**? They’ll change their tune when they see Zerubbabel setting the last stone in place!*

2. God *is* the God of small things and small beginnings—He built the universe out of tiny invisible particles called atoms; He brought forth the human race of 7.4 billion today from one couple, Adam and Eve, and so on...
3. After reading about the great multitudes that were coming to hear Christ and be healed of their sicknesses in the Gospels, it is rather amazing to find that after His death, burial, and resurrection, there were only 120 believers!
4. But fruitfulness and ministry success does NOT necessarily equate with huge crowds: Consider the following:
 - a) Jeremiah, one of the most Christ-like prophets in the Old Testament (he was a man of sorrows, unmarried), had just one lukewarm disciple, Baruch, who was seeking great things for himself;
 - b) Jesus didn’t have a single faithful disciple at the end of His 3½ years;
 - c) Philip left a great revival in Samaria to go out into the desert to preach to one man, the Ethiopian eunuch;
 - d) The fruit of Paul’s ministry in Philippi, the result of his so-called “Macedonian call (see Acts 16),” basically consisted of two families—Lydia and her household, and the jailer and his family! (Some think the man in the vision telling Paul to “Come over the Macedonia and help us” was actually the jailer!)
 - e) Paul went to Athens (see Acts 17), but didn’t even start a church—it depends on the city, not just the pastor;

- f) And that same Paul, arguably the greatest apostle who ever lived (who wrote over half of the New Testament!), found himself all alone at the end of his life:

2 Tim. 4:16-17: ¹⁶*At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them.* ¹⁷*But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength...*

- g) God often begins with barrenness (Sarah, Rebekah, Hannah, etc.) to keep us humble and to ensure that *He* is more important to us than a fruitful ministry— (1 Sam. 1:8: [Elkanah to Hannah]: “Don’t I mean more to you than ten sons?”).
- h) God’s measure of fruit is different from ours—He is looking ahead to the future and what will be coming forth further down the line.
- i) The Sovereign God, who “knows the end from the beginning” (Isa. 46:10; Acts 15:18) knew that this motley crew of 120 was about to explode into thousands in a few days!

- C. Peter expounded on how **Judas’** betrayal and death fulfilled Old Testament prophecy (Ps. 69:25) and how another prophecy needed to be fulfilled in finding someone to replace his apostolic office (vv.20-21)

1. “May another take his place of **leadership** [Gk. *episcopo* = “office of a bishop;” “bishoprick” – KJV],” quoted from Ps. 109:8
2. Peter understood this to mean that after Judas’ defection, a replacement had to be appointed to fill his office and “take over his apostolic ministry” (v.25). It is good to see his prophetic knowledge & desire to obey the word of God.

- D. Whoever was to be chosen had to fulfill two requirements (vv.21-22):

1. He had to be one who had accompanied the disciples during the three years of Christ’s public ministry—from His baptism by John to His ascension.
2. He had to be able to bear responsible witness to the resurrection of the Lord.

- E. Controversy: Was **Matthias** God's choice to replace Judas and become the 12th apostle, or was it **Paul**?
1. Some have wondered if Luke was pointing out that casting lots was a poor substitute for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who became the source of wisdom and discernment for such decisions after Pentecost.
 2. Casting lots was used throughout the Old Testament—it was not the same as voting:
Prov. 16:33: *The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.*
 3. So, was Matthias the Lord's choice? Some propose that Paul, not Matthias, was God's choice for the 12th apostle. They argue that Jesus had told the apostles to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8) and that casting lots is not how the disciples should have made the decision. They also point out that Matthias is never again mentioned in the New Testament, while Paul obviously became very prominent in the early Christian church. Who's right?
 4. The New Testament nowhere condones or condemns the apostles' decision to use lots. And, while Matthias is never again mentioned in the New Testament, the same can be said for most of the other 11 apostles. Church history records that Matthias died as a martyr for Christ, as did all of the other apostles, except John. Yes, Paul was definitely more prominent than Matthias, but Paul was more prominent than any of the 12 apostles, except for perhaps Peter and John. Also, Paul would not have been qualified based on the apostles' criteria (Acts 1:21-22). So, a conclusive biblical case cannot be made for the 11 apostles' choice of Matthias being invalid.
 5. God is sovereign—if it was not His sovereign will for Matthias to be chosen, Matthias would not have been chosen. It could be argued that, while it was God's sovereign will (what He ordained) for Matthias to be chosen, it was God's perfect will (what He desired) for the apostles to wait for Paul. But, this would be pure speculation—the Bible nowhere condemns Matthias being chosen for the 12th apostle. Apparently the choice of

Matthias was sanctioned by the Lord, because the apostles are thereafter called “the Twelve” (see Acts 6:2).

6. So, what name will be written on the 12th foundation in New Jerusalem? The Bible does not explicitly say, but it likely will be Paul. Ultimately, we will have to wait to find out:

Rev. 21:14: *The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the **names of the twelve apostles** of the Lamb.*

IV. CONCLUSION

- A. Before leaving earth, the risen Christ wanted to make sure His apostles were thoroughly convinced about His resurrection. This was critical because He was preparing them to be sent out as “witnesses of His resurrection.”
- B. However, their ministry (and ours!) cannot be accomplished through human means or strength—they had to wait for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.
- C. With emphasis throughout Acts on the importance of the apostolic ministry, especially on “the Twelve,” Peter raised the issue of finding a replacement for Judas.
- D. It is made clear, even at this early stage, that God was raising up Peter to be the leader of the early church; this would be seen more powerfully at Pentecost.
- E. After seeing Jesus ascend back to heaven, the disciples and believers gathered together and began to wait and pray for the baptism in the Holy Spirit—a period of 10 days until the day of Pentecost...

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Part 3: Pentecost & the Birth of the Church (ch. 2)

(No. 1119.3 – 9/21/16 – NLC)

V. THE HOLY SPIRIT COMES AT PENTECOST

Acts 2:1-13: ¹When the day of Pentecost came [“had fully come” – NKJV], they were all together in one place. ²Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. ⁵Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. ⁷Utterly amazed, they asked: “Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?” ⁸Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹(both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” ¹²Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

A. Pentecost had fully come (v.1)

1. “Pentecost” means “fiftieth”—it was the 50th day after the Sabbath of Passover week (see Lev. 23:15-16); it was also called the “Feast of Weeks” (Deut. 16:8-10), the “Feast of Harvest” (Ex. 23:16), and the “Day of Firstfruits” (Num. 28:26)
 - a) Jesus’ crucifixion coincided exactly with the Passover, Himself becoming the perfect Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7)
 - b) The risen Christ would then be with His disciples for a period of 40 days before His ascension (Acts 1:3)
 - c) The 120 would then be waiting in prayer in the upper room for 10 more days—a total of 50 days exactly!

2. Just as Pentecost had been a harvest celebration in the Old Testament—the feast of ingathering—it would now be the key to bringing in a worldwide harvest of souls—the ingathering of nations into the church (Mat. 9:35-10:1; Luke 10:2; John 4:35-38)

B. “They were **all together** in one place” (v.1)

1. The same word translated “joined together” in Acts 1:14 [Gk. *homothumadon* = “with one accord; lit. together with one passion;” see *Section II.B* of Part 2, p.14] is used here.
2. NOTE: If the church today wants to see real revival and a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we can learn a lot from this verse—the anointing flows down from the High Priest’s head (Christ) onto His Body when there is unity and harmony:

Ps. 133:1-3: *¹How good and pleasant it is when brothers live **together in unity** [armonía (Spanish RVR60) = “harmony”]! ²It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron’s beard, down upon the collar of his robes. ³It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows His blessing, even life forevermore.*

C. Suddenly there was **wind and fire** from heaven (vv.2-3)

1. After patiently waiting and counting off 50 days, suddenly...
2. Sometimes, like the widow with the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8), it seems like God “keeps putting us off,” but when His time fully comes, He moves very “quickly”
3. In Hebrew, “wind,” “spirit,” and “breath” are all the same word, *ruach*, as seen in **Ezek. 37:1, 5, 9:** *¹The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the **Spirit** of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley... ⁵This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make **breath** enter you, and you will come to life. ⁹Then He said to me, “Prophesy to the **breath**; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four **winds**, O **breath**, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’”* So it is quite fitting that there

should be the “blowing of a violent wind from heaven” filling the whole house.

4. MSG (v.3): “Then, like a wildfire, the Holy Spirit spread through their ranks.”
5. Luke had already written in his gospel concerning the fire that would accompany the baptism in the Holy Spirit:

Luke 3:16: *John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But One more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”*

D. “All of them were **filled with the Holy Spirit**” (v.4)

1. The promise of the Spirit is for *every* believer (vv.17, 38-39)—God is no respecter of persons (Rom. 2:11)
2. **Luke 11:13:** *If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!*
3. **John 7:37-39:** ³⁷*On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “If **anyone** is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸**Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.**” ³⁹By this He meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.*

E. Tongues of fire rested on each one, and they all “**began to speak in other tongues** as the Spirit enabled them” (vv.3-4)—tongues are a miraculous sign:

1. **Mark 16:17:** *And these **signs** will accompany those who believe: In My name they will drive out demons; **they will speak in new tongues;***
2. **Acts 10:44-46:** ⁴⁴*While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. ⁴⁵The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶**For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.***

3. **Acts 19:1-6:** ¹While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples ²and asked them, “**Did you receive the Holy Spirit** when you believed?” They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” ³So Paul asked, “Then what baptism did you receive?” “John’s baptism,” they replied. ⁴Paul 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.” ⁵On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶When Paul placed his hands on them, the **Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.**
4. **1 Cor. 12:7-11:** ⁷Now to each one the **manifestation of the Spirit** is given for the common good. ⁸To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another **speaking in different kinds of tongues**, and to still another the **interpretation of tongues.** ¹¹All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He gives them to each one, just as He determines...
5. **1 Cor. 13:1, 8:** ¹If I speak in the **tongues of men and of angels**, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal... ⁸Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.
6. **1 Cor. 14:1-40:** ¹Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. ²**For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit.** ³But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. ⁴**He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself**, but he who prophesies edifies the church. ⁵**I would like every one of you to speak in tongues**, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.

⁶Now, brothers, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction? ⁷Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the flute or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? ⁸Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? ⁹So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air.

¹⁰Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. ¹¹If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and he is a foreigner to me. ¹²So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.

¹³For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says. ¹⁴**For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.** ¹⁵So what shall I do? **I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind.** ¹⁶If you are **praising God with your spirit**, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say “Amen” to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying? ¹⁷You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified.

¹⁸**I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.** ¹⁹**But IN THE CHURCH** I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue. ²⁰Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. ²¹In the Law it is written: “Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to Me,” says the Lord.

²²**Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers.** ²³**So if the WHOLE CHURCH comes together and EVERYONE SPEAKS IN TONGUES, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?** ²⁴**But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all,** ²⁵**and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, “God is really among you!”**

²⁶**What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.** ²⁷**If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret.** ²⁸**If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God.**

²⁹**Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said.** ³⁰**And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop.** ³¹**For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged.** ³²**The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets.** ³³**For God is not a God of disorder but of peace...**

³⁹**Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.** ⁴⁰**But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.**

Paul teaches a number of important points about tongues:

- a) He makes a clear distinction between an individual speaking, praying, or singing in tongues in private for his/her own edification (vv.2, 4, 14) and someone exercising the gift of tongues in the church, in which case, the message should be interpreted so the other church members can understand and be edified (vv.6-13, 19, 26-28)
- b) It is obvious that the tongues Paul mentions in v.2 are not to be interpreted or understood—the believer’s spirit is communicating directly with God

7. However, the tongues spoken on the day of Pentecost did not need to be interpreted—they were the native languages known and understood by the Jews who were visiting Jerusalem from foreign countries

F. It is no coincidence that it is the **tongue** the Holy Spirit takes control of when a believer is baptized in the Holy Spirit. James tells us that the tongue can set the whole world on fire, and no man can tame it. But at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit took control of their tongues and would use their tongues to set the world on fire with the gospel of Jesus Christ!

James 3:3-8: ³When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. ⁵Likewise **the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.** ⁶**The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.** ⁷All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, ⁸but **no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.**

G. NOTE: It is interesting that the Lord told Gideon to choose his army of 300 men by separating those that “lapped the water with their **tongues** like a dog” (Judges 7:5-6)!

H. “There were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven” (v.5)

1. MSG: “There were many Jews staying in Jerusalem just then, **devout pilgrims** from all over the world.”
2. The Sovereign God planned this extraordinary event at a time when representatives of every nation would be in Jerusalem, presumably there for Passover and Pentecost
3. Nations listed in the account (vv.9-11): “Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia,

Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹(both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs”

4. In the *Map of the New Testament World*, we can see that the known world consisted only of the nations surrounding the Mediterranean Sea:

MAP OF THE NEW TESTAMENT WORLD



- I. These Jewish pilgrims staying in Jerusalem understood the tongues of the Spirit-baptized believers
 1. They were bewildered because they heard the Galilean believers (who were speaking in tongues) speaking in their own native languages which they (the believers) obviously had not learned nor understood (vv.6-8)
 2. They heard them “declaring the wonders of God” in their own tongues (v.11)
 3. Some wondered about the meaning of all this, while others mocked, saying the believers were drunk (vv.12-13)

4. In one sense, the Good News was about to reach every nation under heaven through Peter's fiery evangelistic message to the crowd...

VI. PETER'S MESSAGE TO THE CROWD

Acts 2:14-40: ¹⁴Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ¹⁷"In the last days, God says, I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. ¹⁸Even on My servants, both men and women, I will pour out My Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. ¹⁹I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. ²⁰The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. ²¹And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

²²"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. ²³This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put Him to death by nailing Him to the cross. ²⁴But God raised Him from the dead, freeing Him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Him.

²⁵David said about Him: "'I saw the Lord always before Me. Because He is at My right hand, I will not be shaken. ²⁶Therefore My heart is glad and My tongue rejoices; My body also will live in hope, ²⁷because You will not abandon Me to the grave, nor will You let Your Holy One see decay. ²⁸You have made known to Me the paths of life; you will fill Me with joy in Your presence.'

²⁹"Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. ³⁰But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that He would place one of his descendants on his throne. ³¹Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was not abandoned to the grave, nor did His body see decay. ³²God has

raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.

³³*Exalted to the right hand of God, He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. ³⁴For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, “The Lord said to My Lord: “Sit at My right hand ³⁵ until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.””*

³⁶*“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” ³⁷When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”*

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. ³⁹The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” ⁴⁰With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” ⁴¹Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*

- A. This is a different Peter from the one who denied Christ three times and called down curses (see Luke 22:31-34, 54-62); Pentecost had transformed Peter into a bold lion: “Then Peter **stood up** with the Eleven, **raised his voice** and addressed the crowd: ‘Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; **listen carefully to what I say**’” (v.14)
- B. The apostle Peter first showed that the outpouring of the Spirit was the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy (vv.16-21)
 - 1. This is extremely important, as Paul would later teach that the church is “built on the foundation of the **apostles and prophets**, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20).
 - 2. Apostolic preaching in the book of Acts often incorporated Old Testament prophecies and how they were being fulfilled; of the 7 sermons recorded in the book of Acts (5 by Peter, 2 of Paul), 5 of them begin by referring to Old Testament prophecy. Peter would later write about the importance of the prophets:

1 Pet. 1:10-12: ¹⁰*Concerning this salvation, the **prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come** to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, ¹¹trying to find out the*

*time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when He **predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.** ¹²It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.*

3. Joel predicted the outpouring of God’s Spirit “on all people”—men & women, young & old—on everyone
 4. Prophecy, visions, dreams, and miraculous signs would be a prominent feature of this outpouring
 5. **The end purpose: That everyone would call on the name of the Lord and be saved** (God is not willing that any should perish – 2 Pet. 3:9)
- C. Peter then boldly preached Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection from the dead (vv.22-24)
1. When preaching to the Jews, the apostles often stressed that it was *the Jews* who were guilty of His death (vv.23, 36; 3:12-14; 4:10-11; 5:30; 10:39; 13:27): “You killed Him, God raised Him!”
 2. It was, nevertheless, all according to “God’s set purpose and foreknowledge” (v.23)
- D. In vv.25-35, the apostle again used the prophetic writings of David to show how they pointed to Christ’s resurrection
- E. “Let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both **Lord** and **Christ**” (v.36)
1. Using both the prophets and his own personal witness, Peter showed all of the Jews present that Jesus is the Messiah and He is **Lord** [Gk. *kurios* = “supreme in authority;” “master” – MSG]
 2. Because God has now exalted Jesus “to the right hand of God” (v.33) as Lord, that means He has ALL AUTHORITY!

Mat. 28:18-20: ¹⁸*Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.*

¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

F. As a result of Peter’s preaching, “they were **cut** to the heart” (v.37)

1. “Cut” [Gk. *katanusso* = “to pierce thoroughly, agitate violently; to sting to the quick; to cut or prick”]
2. Jesus had taught the disciples that when the Holy Spirit came, He would bring conviction of sin into people’s hearts:

John 16:7-9: ⁷But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, **the Counselor** will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. ⁸When He comes, **He will convict** [lit. “convince”] **the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment:** ⁹in regard to sin, because men do not believe in Me; [NOTE: Convincing sinners is NOT our job!]

G. They now had only one question: “What shall we do?” (v.37)

1. Behold the mysterious working of the Holy Spirit: these who were earlier making fun of the disciples, mocking them and accusing them of being drunk at 9:00 a.m.—were now pierced, broken, and humbled, like clay in the Potter’s hands!
2. Their query was *not*, “How do we join?” or “Where are we supposed to go?” or “What are we to believe?” It was, **“What shall we do?”**

H. Peter had an answer ready for them: Repent, be baptized, and receive the Holy Spirit (v.38)

1. **“Repent”** [Gk. *metanoeo* = “to think differently; to reconsider (morally to feel compunction)”]
 - a) AMP: “Repent (change your views and purpose to accept the will of God in your inner selves instead of rejecting it)”
 - b) MSG: **“Change your life. Turn to God...”**

- c) Definition: A change of mind, attitude and purpose; turning away from darkness and sin, and turning toward God, accepting His will and ways.
- d) NOTE: If there is no real change in a person's life, then it is *not* real grace:

Tit. 2:11-12: ¹¹*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. ¹²It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age...*

- 2. **“Be baptized”** [Gk. *baptizo* = “to make whelmed (that is, fully wet); to dunk, immerse”]
 - a) Water baptism by total immersion
 - b) “Every one of you” (it is not an option!)
 - c) Baptism is an important part of the Great Commission

Mat. 28:18-20: ¹⁸*Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. ¹⁹Therefore go and **make disciples** of all nations, **baptizing them** in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

- 3. **“You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”**
 - a) The Holy Spirit is promised to every true believer who has repented and obeyed the Lord in water baptism
 - b) “Gift” [Gk. *dorea* = “a gratuity; free gift”]; used also in Acts 8:20; 10:45; 11:17, in reference to the Holy Spirit

I. **With many other words he warned them;** and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation” (v.40)

- 1. MSG: “He went on in this vein for a long time, urging them over and over, “Get out while you can; get out of this sick and stupid culture!”
- 2. Luke doesn't record what Peter said, but the apostle spoke **“many other words,”** urging those listening to escape the corruption of the world.

- J. 3,000 accepted his message, were baptized, and joined the church that day. (And they didn't need fog machines, entertainment, or famous celebrities.) In less than 24 hours, the fledgling church had grown from 120 to 3,000!

VII. THE FELLOWSHIP OF BELIEVERS

Acts 2:42-47: ⁴²*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.* ⁴³*Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.* ⁴⁴*All the believers were together and had everything in common.* ⁴⁵*Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.* ⁴⁶*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, ⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their **number** [“church” – KJV] daily those who were being saved.*

- A. **Fellowship** [Gk. *koinonia* = “partnership, participation, social intercourse, communication, communion, fellowship”] was a predominant activity amongst the more than 3,000 baptized believers making up the church:
1. They met together for the **apostles' teachings**, to break bread, and for prayer;
 2. They shared everything in common, giving to anyone in need;
 3. MSG (v.44): “All the believers lived in a wonderful harmony.”
 4. They met together daily in the temple;
- B. “Many **wonders and miraculous signs** were done by the apostles” (v.43)
1. Now empowered by the Holy Spirit, there were many supernatural manifestations of the Spirit's wisdom and power;
 2. Miraculous signs and wonders are the mark of a true apostle (see *Section I.B* of Part 2, p.6):
- 2 Cor. 12:11-12:** ¹¹*I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the “super-apostles,” even though I am nothing.* ¹²*The **things that mark an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles**—were done among you with great perseverance.*

- C. “Everyone was **filled with awe**” (v.43)
 - 1. There was a sense of wonder and amazement because of the power and presence of the Lord—everyone recognized that something supernatural was taking place
 - 2. Miraculous signs and manifestations of the Holy Spirit transcended their understanding and previous experiences, arousing questions like, “What does this mean?” and “What shall we do?”
- D. The church was “enjoying the **favor** of all the people” (v.47)
 - 1. There was a feeling of goodwill between the church and the community
 - 2. MSG: “People in general liked what they saw.”
- E. The church **continued to grow**—the Lord was adding new members daily to their “number”
 - 1. “Number” [Gk. *ekklesia* = “lit. the called out ones; congregation, assembly, church”]; found only twice in all 4 gospels (Mat. 16:18; 18:17), v.47 is the first instance in Acts where the “church” is mentioned
 - 2. Most Bible scholars agree that the church was born on the day of Pentecost

VIII. CONCLUSION

- A. As predicted by the prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel and Joel, the baptism of the Holy Spirit had finally come. Jesus had been glorified (John 7:37-39) and exalted to God’s right hand, so the Counselor could now be poured out (Acts 2:33)
- B. Pentecost stirred the whole city of Jerusalem, and in one day, representatives from all nations heard the message of the gospel!
- C. The church had been born, and we can learn many things from this chapter of Acts: **What are the marks of a true church?** What does the real church look like? Here’s a summary:
 - 1. Anointed preaching: Christ crucified, resurrected & exalted *is* the HEADLINE!

2. Sinners & unbelievers are cut to the heart, coming under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, leading to true repentance—separation from the corruptions of the world;
 3. New converts are regularly being saved, baptized, filled with the Holy Spirit, and added to the church;
 4. There is unity & harmony amongst all the believers;
 5. Believers are in regular fellowship, eating and worshipping together;
 6. Everyone in the community shares everything in common—genuine love, charity and care are expressed for one another;
 7. Believers are in steadfast & continual prayer;
 8. There is devotion to apostolic teaching;
 9. Careful and regular study of prophetic Scripture is made in order to have a clear understanding of the times;
 10. The fullness of the Holy Spirit is evident—many miracles, signs and wonders take place;
 11. There is a spirit of joy, gladness and praise in the church;
 12. Everyone is filled with awe and wonder;
 13. They enjoyed favor and goodwill with all the people in the community;
- D. Hopefully, Acts 2 will stir all of us to earnest prayer: “Lord, build Your church. Pour out Your Spirit on all flesh in these last days. Bring anointed preaching that pierces hearts back into our churches. Unite Your people in love and true fellowship so we can win the world for Christ! Amen.”

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Part 4: Growth of the Jerusalem Church (chs. 3-5)

(No. 1119.4 – 10/26/16 – NLC)

I. LAME BEGGAR HEALED

Acts 3:1-10: ¹One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. ²Now 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. ³When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. ⁴Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” ⁵So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

⁶Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” ⁷Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. ⁸He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. ⁹When all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰they 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.

- A. “Going up to the temple at the **time of prayer**” (v.1)
1. Prayer continued to be a central part of the Christian life in the early church [see *Section II.C* of Part 2 on p.14]
 2. Apostolic life centered around 2 things: prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4)
- B. The **lame beggar** had been crippled from birth and was now over 40 years old (Acts 4:22)
1. He had been begging every day at the same spot for a long time—everyone knew him (v.10)
 2. He had probably lost all hope of ever walking

C. “Silver or gold I do not have” (v.6)

1. He wanted money—Peter didn’t have what the beggar *wanted*, but he had what he *needed*—the power of God! [How often the things we are searching for in life are *not* the things we really need!]
2. One witty old preacher has observed, “The crippled beggar asked for *alms* and instead, he got *legs!*”
3. Sadly, the motto of many ministries today (like the Laodicean church in Revelation 3) is “We no longer need to say with Peter, ‘Silver and gold I do not have! We are rich, have acquired wealth, and do not need a thing.’” But neither can they say with Peter to the cripple, “Rise up and walk!”

D. What irony: a lame beggar sitting at the **gate Beautiful!**

1. This is a stark reminder of the poverty, necessity and ignorance which abound in the very shadow of great cathedrals and lavish religious temples, and of the helplessness of those mighty ecclesiastical systems to assist those who are physical and spiritual cripples.
2. NOTE: Never once in the book of Acts is there any mention of a church building program or of churches buying property.
3. The lame man was unable to enter through the gate into the temple, but in a figure, Jesus was about to show everyone that He had made a “new and living way” into the Most Holy Place through His own blood (Heb. 10:19-20)
4. NOTE: It was 3:00 p.m.—the very hour Jesus had spilled His blood on Calvary to open the veil into the Holiest of all:
Mat. 27:45-51: ⁴⁵*From the sixth hour (12:00 noon) until the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.) darkness came over all the land.* ⁴⁶*About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?”—which means, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” ...* ⁵⁰*And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, He gave up His spirit.* ⁵¹*At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split.*

- E. “In the name of Jesus Christ” (v.6)
1. Not by their own power or authority (see v.12), but as representatives of the One who has ALL POWER & AUTHORITY!
 2. When the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles and believers on the day of Pentecost, they received power; now God was beginning to manifest that power through various gifts of the Spirit, which include the “gifts of healing” and “miraculous powers” (see 1 Cor. 12:7-11)
- F. “[Peter] **Taking him by the right hand**, he helped him up” (v.7)
1. In the walk of faith, there is a curious mingling of the divine and the human. Peter helped the man to his feet; then God performed the cure. We must do what we can do; then God will help us to do what we cannot. Peter’s helping him up in no way detracts from the supernatural miracle that only God could work.
 2. Peter had seen the Master do this on various occasions, even in the healing of his own mother-in-law:
 - a) **Mark 1:30-31:** ³⁰*Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her. ³¹So He went to her, **took her hand and helped her up**. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.*
 - b) **Mark 9:25-27:** ²⁵*When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, He rebuked the evil spirit. “You deaf and mute spirit,” He said, “I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.” ²⁶The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, “He’s dead.” ²⁷But **Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.***
 3. We see this again in Peter’s ministry some time later:

Acts 9:40-41: ⁴⁰*Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, “Tabitha, get up.” She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. ⁴¹**He took her by the***

hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive.

- G. “**Instantly** the man’s feet and ankles became strong... he went into the temple courts, walking and jumping and praising God” (vv.7-8)
1. This was undeniably an “outstanding miracle” (Acts 4:16)—it was an instantaneous, “complete healing”
 2. How fitting that his first steps should be “into the temple”—sadly, we often see the opposite—people in need come to church, God works a miracle in their life, and then, like the 9 lepers, they run away, never to be seen again (see Luke 17:11-19)
 3. Everyone was “filled with wonder and amazement” (v.10) because they recognized this to be the beggar they had seen for years at the temple gate

II. PETER PREACHES TO THE ONLOOKERS

Acts 3:11-26: ¹¹*While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon’s Colonnade.* ¹²*When Peter saw this, he said to them: “Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?”* ¹³*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.* ¹⁴*You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you.* ¹⁵*You killed the author of life, but God raised Him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.* ¹⁶*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.*

¹⁷*“Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders.* ¹⁸*But this is how God fulfilled what He had foretold through all the prophets, saying that His Christ would suffer.* ¹⁹*Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,* ²⁰*and that He may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus.* ²¹*He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to*

restore everything, as He promised long ago through His holy prophets. ²²For 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. ²³Anyone who does not listen to Him will be completely cut off from among His people.’

²⁴“Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. ²⁵And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, ‘Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.’ ²⁶When God raised up His servant, He sent Him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.”

A. “The beggar held on to Peter and John” (v.11)

1. He remained by Peter’s side while he preached to the crowd (v.12)
2. He was still with the apostles the next day after they had been arrested and released (Acts 4:14)

B. “**Why do you stare at us** as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?” (v.12)

1. Peter quickly diverted any attention or praise away from themselves—how prone we humans are to the folly of idol worship and glorying in the flesh!
2. Through all of his previous failures (denying Christ 3 times and forsaking Him), Peter was now broken, humbled and crushed. He knew himself all too well! The keys of the kingdom had been given to Peter (Mat. 16:17-19), but God had to carefully prepare him so that when He used him in miraculous ways, Peter would never think of taking the glory to himself.
3. The seasoned, elderly founder of a famous Bible School is reported to have told his young graduates, “I have one desire that each of you would leave here and be failures; failure will do something in your spirit that success will never do!”
4. No flesh can glory in His presence. God can’t use us as long as we are promoting ourselves. The Lord can speak through a donkey; He lifts the poor and needy beggars out of the

dunghill and sets them on His throne. If we think a miracle happened *because of us*—our holiness or spirituality—we better think again! God’s great works are accomplished *in spite of us*!

- C. Peter immediately focused their attention on Christ and His resurrection (vv.13-16)
1. As in his sermon of the day of Pentecost, he again blamed the Jews for rejecting, disowning, and murdering God’s Holy and Righteous One
 2. But the God of their fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—raised His servant Jesus from the dead
 3. The cripple’s miraculous healing was the result of “faith in the name of Jesus,” not human virtue or godliness (v.16)
- D. “Now, brothers, I know you acted in ignorance” (v.17)
1. Peter’s tone softened—he was now ready to tell them the good news of forgiveness
 2. And as he did at Pentecost, he emphasized that Christ’s sufferings & death fulfilled what the prophets had foretold (v.18)
- E. “**Repent and turn** [“be converted, revert; stop sinning”] to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord” (v.19)
1. AMP: “So repent (change your mind and purpose); turn around and return [to God], that your sins may be erased (blotted out, wiped clean), that times of refreshing (of recovering from the effects of heat, of reviving with fresh air) may come from the presence of the Lord.”
 2. Repentance and turning to God are always the first step (see Acts 2:38)
 3. What wonderful news: your sins can be **wiped out** [Gk. *exaleipho* = “to blot or smear out; erase; obliterate”]
 4. “Refreshing” [Gk. *anapsuxis* = “a recovery of breath; revival”]
 5. “From the **presence** [Gk. *prosopon* = “face, countenance”] of the Lord” (NKJV); just as sin hides God face from us, so repentance causes Him to turn His face toward us once again:

Isa. 59:2: *But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.*

- F. Jesus will come again and God will restore all things as He promised through the prophets (vv.20-21)
1. Jesus must remain in heaven for now until God's appointed time
 2. A time of **restoration** [Gk. *apokatastasis* = "reconstitution, restitution"] of all things is promised
 - a) **2 Pet. 3:10-13:** ¹⁰*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.* ¹¹*Since **everything will be destroyed** in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives* ¹²*as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.* ¹³*But **in keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.***
 - b) **Rev. 21:1:** *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.*
- G. Peter boldly stated that **Jesus is the Prophet** Moses spoke of in Deuteronomy:
1. "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'" (v.22)
 2. **Deut. 18:15:** *The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.*
- H. "All of the prophets, from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days" (vv.24-25)
1. Peter again showed how Christ *is* the fulfillment of all that the prophets had written

2. He had no doubt heard Jesus explaining how *He* was the fulfillment of Moses and the Prophets:

Luke 24:25-27: ²⁵*He [Jesus] said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter His glory?” ²⁷And beginning with **Moses and all the Prophets**, He explained to them **what was said** in all the Scriptures **concerning Himself.***

- I. Peter ended by telling his Jewish brothers that God had sent the promised Abrahamic blessing **first to the house of Israel** by raising Christ from the dead and turning them from their wicked ways (v.26)
 1. MSG: “But **you are first in line**: God, having raised up His Son, sent Him to bless you as you turn, one by one, from your evil ways.”
 2. **Rom. 1:16:** *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: **first for the Jew**, then for the Gentile.* [In Romans 11, Paul gives an extensive explanation about this order: the natural olive branches (Jews) were broken off so that wild branches (Gentiles) could be grafted in].
 3. **John 4:22:** [Jesus to the Samaritan woman]: *You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for **salvation is from the Jews.***
 4. Later in Acts, we will see that whenever the apostles went to a new city, they *first* went to the synagogue to present the gospel to the Jews in that city:
 - a) **Acts 13:14, 44-46:** ¹⁴*From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath **they entered the synagogue** and sat down... ⁴⁴On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. ⁴⁶Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “**We had to speak the word of God to you first.** Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, **we now turn to the Gentiles.***

- b) **Acts 14:1:** *At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.*
- c) **Acts 17:1-2:** *¹When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. ²As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures...*

III. PETER AND JOHN BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

Acts 4:1-22: *¹The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. ²They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. ³They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. ⁴But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.*

⁵The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. ⁶Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family. ⁷They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, ¹⁰then 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. ¹¹He is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone." ¹²Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

¹³When 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. ¹⁴But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them,

there was nothing they could say. ¹⁵So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. ¹⁶“What are we going to do with these men?” they asked. “Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name.”

¹⁸Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹But Peter and John replied, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. ²⁰For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

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

A. “The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John” (v.1)

1. The first persecution of the infant church was breaking out. If we want all the power and revival they had in the early church, we need to expect the *opposition and persecution* they had also!
2. The **priests** represented religious intolerance, the **captain of the temple guard** (“chief of the Temple police” – MSG) civil and political enmity, and the **Sadducees**, modernism and naturalistic unbelief (they did not believe in the resurrection (see Acts 23:6-8)

B. “They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead” (v.2)

1. These leaders were **greatly disturbed** [Gk. *diaponeo* = “toil through, be worried or grieved” (KJV)]; “worried” seems to be the best translation here—their position and authority were being threatened by the apostles—their miracles and teachings, especially about the resurrection of Jesus; **fear & jealousy** (see Acts 5:17) are often the primary motivators behind persecution

2. The priests and Sadducees felt they had sole claim to being the teachers of the people
 3. The apostles' preaching of the resurrection of Jesus would have been particularly unsettling to the Sadducees who didn't believe in resurrection
- C. **Peter and John were arrested**, but the word of God was not bound—the church had now grown to 5,000 men, not counting women and children (vv.3-4)
- D. The Sanhedrin called Peter & John in for questioning: (vv.5-7)
1. The court included rulers, elders and teachers of the law; Annas the high priest (he was formerly high priest but perhaps was allowed to retain the title as a courtesy), Caiaphas (the son-in-law of Annas, who presided at the trial of the Lord – see Luke 3:2; John 18:12-14), and many others
 2. These were the *very* authorities that had plotted Jesus' arrest and death, ultimately handing him over to Pilate to be crucified! (see Mat. 26:1-5, 57-66; 27:1-2)
- E. “By what power or **what name** did you do this?” (v.7)
1. “Name” [Gk. *onoma* often conveyed the idea of “authority”]
 2. MSG: “They stood Peter and John in the middle of the room and grilled them: “Who put you in charge here? What business do you have doing this?”
 3. What a beautiful setup for Peter to preach to these avowed enemies of Christ
- F. “Then **Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit**, said to them: ‘Rulers and elders of the people!’” (v.8)
1. Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit (this wasn't a one-time experience that only happened on the day of Pentecost— Acts 2:4)
 2. The Holy Spirit gave him great boldness (see v.13)
 3. MSG: “With that, Peter, full of the Holy Spirit, **let loose**: ‘Rulers and leaders of the people.’”

- G. In Peter’s brief but fiery response, he outlined five critical things (vv.9-12):
1. These leaders were upset because of an act of kindness shown to a cripple (Peter didn’t say it, but these leaders had seen the lame man begging at the gate for years and they had been powerless to help him)
 2. The cripple was healed by the power and authority of Jesus’ name
 3. This was the *same* Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom these leaders had crucified—they were the “builders” who fulfilled Psalm 118:22 by rejecting the Capstone Jesus!
 4. God raised Jesus from the dead (attested to by the miraculous healing of the lame man)
 5. Salvation is found in no one else but Jesus, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved (see John 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5)
- H. “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)
1. What most impressed Peter’s accusers was his **boldness and courage** [Gk. *parrhesia* = “all out spokenness; frankness, bluntness, assurance: boldness, confidence”]
 2. Oh, how we need preachers and politicians alike in these last days who will “tell it like it is”—no mincing of words, no political correctness—frankness and bluntness!
 3. These Galilean fishermen “were unlearned and untrained in the schools [common men with no educational advantages]” – AMP; they had none of the formal religious training these experts had, but they spoke with such authority (see Mat. 7:28-29)
 4. The religious leaders could come up with only one explanation for their boldness, eloquence, and authority—they had been with Jesus! [NOTE: More accurately, not only had they *been with Jesus* for the past 3½ years, Jesus was now living in them through the power and the infilling of the Holy Spirit].

- I. The priests and elders had a **serious dilemma** (vv.14-16):
1. They couldn't deny that a notable miracle had taken place—they couldn't say anything because the *miracle* was standing right there in front of them! (God has a way of paralyzing the accusing tongues of His enemies when He manifests His power!)
 2. Everybody in Jerusalem knew about this miracle, and the priests also knew that many people were becoming believers and joining The Way (v.4)
 3. They couldn't punish the apostles for performing an act of kindness; yet if they did not stop these fanatics, their own religion would be seriously threatened by the loss of followers
- J. The Sanhedrin's answer: ““But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to **speak no longer to anyone in this name.**’ Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.” (vv.17-18)
1. Note that their motivation was fear—fear of losing their power, influence and following; sadly, this is still the source of much conflict in Christian circles—the religious establishment and great ecclesiastical councils feel threatened by genuine movements that are born out of fresh outpourings of the Holy Spirit. The flesh always wars against the Spirit, and dead religion will always be threatened by new life:
Gal. 4:28-29: ²⁸*Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.* ²⁹*At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. IT IS THE SAME NOW.*
 2. Their only remedy was to try to muzzle and silence the apostles—they threatened them not to teach or speak anymore in Jesus' name
- K. But the religious leaders forgot to take into account the boldness of Peter & John (vv.19-21)
1. “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.”

2. We must always obey the highest authority (see Acts 5:29)—we must never obey men who coax or threaten us to disobey God!
3. “After **further threats** they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because **all the people were praising God** for what had happened.”

IV. BELIEVERS’ PRAYER FOR BOLDNESS & MIRACLES

Acts 4:23-31: ²³*On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. ²⁴When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “You made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. ²⁵You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of Your servant, our father David:*

“‘Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ²⁶The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.’

²⁷Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed. ²⁸They did what Your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. ²⁹Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable Your servants to speak Your word with great boldness. ³⁰Stretch out Your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.”

³¹After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

- A. “On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them” (v.23)
 1. After imprisonment, interrogation, and threats, the freed apostles went where they would find the greatest strength and comfort—“to **their own people**”—they didn’t go to

their blood relatives, they went to their new family, the church!

2. It was the apostles' custom to **report** back to the church, giving accounts of their ministry, travels, and as seen here, even their persecutions:
 - a) **Acts 14:27:** *On arriving there [Antioch], they [Paul and Barnabas] 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.*
 - b) **Acts 15:4:** *When they [Paul and Barnabas] came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom **they reported everything God had done** through them.*
 - c) **Acts 21:19:** *Paul greeted them [brothers at Jerusalem] and **reported in detail what God had done** among the Gentiles through his ministry.*

B. “They raised their voices together in prayer to God. **‘Sovereign Lord...’**” (v.24)

1. In their opening address to God as they began their prayer, two different Greek words are used for emphasis, as reflected in the NKJV translation: “**Lord** [Gk. *despotes*: “an absolute ruler, despot, Lord, master”], You are **God**” [Gk. *theos* = “deity, the supreme Divinity”]
2. It was already firmly established in the early church that God, as Supreme Ruler, had all authority and He had made Jesus Lord of everything (see Acts 2:36)
3. God is sovereign—that means He is in absolute control, He made everything, and He rules (reigns) over everything
 - a) **Dan. 4:34-35:** ³⁴*At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the **Most High**; I honored and glorified Him who lives forever. **His dominion** is an eternal dominion; **His kingdom** endures from generation to generation. ³⁵*All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. **He does as He pleases** with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. **No one can hold back His hand** or say to Him: “What have You done?”**

- b) **Ps. 115:3:** *Our God is in heaven; He does whatever pleases Him.*
 - c) **Ps. 135:6:** *The LORD does whatever pleases Him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths.*
4. It is important to know that the God we are praying to is Sovereign—He can do ANYTHING!
- C. In vv.25-27, they showed how the persecution they were experiencing was also fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Psalm 2):
- 1. **Ps. 2:1-2:** ¹*Why do the nations **conspire** and the peoples plot in vain?* ²*The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and **against His Anointed One.***
 - 2. “Herod and Pontius Pilate (kings & rulers) met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed.”
 - a) Their united attack was actually against *Christ*, as Jesus Himself would later confirm in His encounter with Saul (Paul) of Tarsus:
 - b) **Acts 9:4-5:** [Jesus]: ⁴*“Saul, Saul, **why do you persecute Me?**”* ⁵*“Who are you, Lord?”* Saul asked. **“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,”** He replied.
- D. “They did what Your power and will had decided beforehand should happen” (v.28)
- 1. It would seem on the surface that all of the Jewish religious leaders, together with Herod and Pilate, had conspired against Jesus to do what *their* wicked hearts had planned and purposed;
 - 2. But the Sovereign God threw them a curveball here—they actually carried out *God’s **predestined hand*** and *purpose*; their opposition to God’s divine will proved to be a stroke of alliance with it! They had waged war against Christ, unwittingly signing a treaty for the promotion of Christ’s glory!

3. David’s prophecy continues to say this about those that conspire against God and His anointed:

Ps. 2:4: *The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.*

4. Our God doesn’t always beat down storms that rise against Him—sometimes He rides upon them; He isn’t swept away by floods—He sets His throne on top of them:

a) **Ps. 68:4:** *Sing to God, sing praise to His name, extol Him who rides on the clouds—His name is the LORD—and rejoice before Him.*

b) **Ps. 29:10:** *The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD is enthroned as King forever.*

- E. In light of the threats the apostles had received from the religious leaders, one might expect the church’s prayer to be for their safety or protection—instead, they asked for two things: **more boldness** and **miracles** (vv.29-30)!

1. “Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable Your servants to **speak Your word with great boldness**. Stretch out Your hand to **heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders** through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.”
2. In other words, “Lord, let us not be intimidated by their threats; give us *even more* boldness to proclaim Your word fearlessly!”
3. It was a *miracle* that had gotten them in trouble (the healing of the lame man), and now they are asking for *more miracles*, for they had seen how a miracle broadens the platform, enlarges the audience, and extends the message of the gospel.

- F. God’s answer: “After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was **shaken**. And they were all **filled with the Holy Spirit** and **spoke the word of God boldly** (v.31)

1. Oh, that the church could return to this kind of prayer! How desperately we need our houses of worship and prayer to be shaken with Holy Spirit, pew-rattling power! *Dear God, deliver us from stale, lukewarm, half-hearted prayers; set our hearts ablaze with Holy Spirit fire and restore fervent prayer to Your church:*

James 5:16: *The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*

2. The answer is simple—get back to Acts 2:4: ALL WERE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT!
- G. There are seven instances in Acts where people were filled/full of the Holy Spirit, with various purposes or results:
1. For speaking (Acts 2:4; 4:8; 4:31)
 2. For serving (Acts 6:3)
 3. For ministry (Acts 11:24)
 4. For rebuking (Acts 13:9)
 5. For dying (Acts 7:55)

V. BELIEVERS SHARE EVERYTHING IN COMMON

Acts 4:32-37: ³²*All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.* ³³*With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all.* ³⁴*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* ³⁵*and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.*

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

- A. What we see here is a continuation of what we saw in chapter 2—sharing, fellowship, unity and caring amongst all of the believers (vv.32, 34-35)
- B. “With **great power** the **apostles** continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all” (v.33)
 1. Luke continues to emphasize the centrality of the apostolic ministry to all that God was doing in the church
 2. God gave them great power and great grace for ministry

- C. “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” (vv.34-35).
1. This was *not* Christian socialism or communism for the following reasons:
 - a) The sale of property was quite voluntary
 - b) The right of possession was not abolished
 - c) The community did not control the money until it had voluntarily been given to the apostles
 - d) The distribution was not made equally but according to need
 2. Somewhat sarcastic but sadly too often true is F. E. Marsh’s modern parallel:

One has said, in contrasting the early church with the Christianity of today, “Is it not a solemn thought, that if the evangelist Luke were describing modern instead of primitive Christianity, he would have to vary the phraseology of Acts 4:32-35 somewhat as follows:

‘And the multitude of them that professed were of hard heart and stony soul, and every one said that all the things which he possessed were his own: and they had all things in the fashion. And with great power gave they witness to the attractions of this world, and great selfishness was upon them all. And there were many among them that lacked love, for as many as were possessors of lands bought more, and sometimes gave a small part thereof for a public good, so their names were heralded in the newspapers, and distribution of praise was made to every one according as he desired.’”
 3. The selling of lands and properties is important for three reasons (vv.34-37):
 - a) It shows the genuineness of their love for one another and the seriousness of their commitment to follow the Lord; Jesus had told His apostles to sell everything and follow Him (Luke 12:33; 14:26-33; Mark 10:21)

- b) It reinforces what we have been saying about the importance of the apostolic ministry—God gave them great authority, entrusting them with large sums of money (all of the money was laid at their feet), and He also gave them great wisdom to distribute the money according to the peoples’ needs
 - c) It serves as a backdrop for what was coming next—the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira
- D. “Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called **Barnabas** (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet” (vv.36-37)
1. Here we are first introduced to Barnabas, later to be called an apostle (Acts 14:14); he was the one who first introduced Paul to the other apostles (Acts 9:27) and would be an important companion to Paul in his missionary travels.
 2. Although Levites owned no inherited land in Israel (see Num. 18:20-21; Deut. 18:1-2), it is not clear how Barnabas had land to sell; it is possible that the regulations didn’t apply to lands in foreign countries such as Cyprus that were outside of Israel, or possibly the land had been his wife’s property.
 3. After his conversion, the apostles began to call him Barnabas, which means “Son of Encouragement,” so named because of the obvious grace in his life to bring comfort, encouragement, and consolation to others:
 - a) **Acts 11:23-24:** ²³*When he [Barnabas] 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. ²⁴**He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.***
 - b) NOTE: Jesus had surnamed two of the apostles (James and John) “Sons of Thunder” (see Mark 3:17)—some console, some thunder—there are diversities of gifts and ministries (see 1 Cor. 12:3-6) and manifold grace that comes in many different forms (see 1 Pet. 4:10), *all* necessary to bring the Body of Christ to full maturity!

VI. ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

Acts 5:1-11: ¹Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. ²With 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.

³Then 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? ⁴Didn'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."

⁵When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. ⁶Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

⁷About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price."

⁹Peter 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." ¹⁰At 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. ¹¹Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

- A. Ananias and Sapphira, for unknown reasons, sold a property (as many others were doing) and lied about the price, secretly keeping a portion of the proceeds for themselves (vv.1-4)
1. No one asked them to sell the land, and even after it was sold, they were not obligated to give any or all of it
 2. Perhaps they sought the praise of men for their charitable almsgiving (see Mat. 6:1-4), or just wanted to imitate what others were doing
 3. But they *pretended* a total consecration and dedication like that of Barnabas—they were hypocrites

4. Here we see the first sin in the life of the early church—the love of money (1 Tim. 6:10); no wonder Paul called it the “root of all evil.”
- B. Peter discerned that **Satan** had filled Ananias’ heart and he charged him with lying to the Holy Spirit (v.3) and to God (v.4).
1. When God is working in power, Satan is on hand to counterfeit, corrupt, and contend; but where there is real spiritual power, deceit and hypocrisy will be readily exposed
 2. This is first of several references to Satan or the devil in the book of Acts:
 - a) **Acts 10:38:** *How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the **devil**, because God was with Him.*
 - b) **Acts 13:9-10:** ⁹*Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, ¹⁰“You are a **child of the devil** and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?”*
 - c) **Acts 26:17-18:** [Jesus]: ¹⁷*“I will rescue you [Paul] from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them ¹⁸to 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.”*
- C. “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” (vv.5-6)
1. Ananias never had a chance to answer Peter’s four questions—the Lord’s heavy hand of chastening struck him down instantly and suddenly
 2. God is patient and long-suffering, but He is also a consuming fire; He may rebuke and warn us over and over,

giving us a space of time to repent, but He can suddenly lower the boom:

Prov. 29:1: *A man who remains stiff-necked **after many rebukes** will **suddenly be destroyed**—without remedy.*

3. Paul taught that we need to know *both* the patient kindness of God as well as His sternness and severity:
 - a) **Rom. 11:22:** *Consider therefore the **kindness** and **sternness** of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in His kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.*
 - b) AMP: “Then note and appreciate the **gracious kindness** and the **severity** of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s gracious kindness to you—provided you continue in His grace and abide in His kindness; otherwise you too will be cut off (pruned away).”
4. **Great fear seized everyone** (vv.5, 11): God wanted to establish right from the start that He wasn’t “playing church”—this was serious business. Ananias had deliberately lied to and insulted the Holy Spirit, and there would be consequences:

Heb. 10:26-31: *²⁶If we **deliberately** keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, ²⁷but only a **fearful expectation of judgment** and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. ²⁸Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹**How much more severely** do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has **insulted the Spirit** of grace? ³⁰For we know Him who said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge His people.” ³¹It is a **dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.***

- D. Sapphira, unaware of her husband’s tragic end, perpetuated the lie and met the same fate (vv.7-10)
1. Peter charged her with “putting the Holy Spirit **to the test;**” this was a sort of “test or trial run” to see what they could get away with!
 2. If there had been no dire consequences for their sin, other believers would have lost respect for God and thought they could also get away with fooling the Holy Spirit, profiting from being dishonest.
 3. Delayed punishment can often encourage people to continue in their wrongdoing, while swift judgment has a way of discouraging evildoing:
 - a) **Eccl. 8:11:** *When the sentence for a crime is not **quickly** carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong.*
 - b) **MSG:** *Because the sentence against evil deeds is so long in coming, people in general **think they can get by with murder.***
- E. “**Great fear** seized the whole church” (v.11)
1. Peter’s ability to expose Ananias and Sapphira’s hypocrisy and to pronounce judgment on them is yet further evidence of the great supernatural power God had given to the apostles to establish the early church; it would later be demonstrated in Paul’s authority to deliver the offender in the Corinthian church over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh (1 Cor. 5:5)
 2. Peter’s unusual power and authority (manifested even more amazingly in v.15) certainly bring back to mind the words Jesus had spoken specifically to him at Caesarea Philippi:

Mat. 16:18-19: ¹⁸*And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. ¹⁹**I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.***
 3. The church was growing, but with growth, there come growing pains as well

VII. APOSTOLIC SIGNS AND WONDERS

Acts 5:12-16: ¹²*The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade.* ¹³*No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people.* ¹⁴*Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.* ¹⁵*As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by.* ¹⁶*Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed.*

- A. God continued to give the apostles great power and authority; though held in high regard by the people, the apostles were also feared, especially after Ananias' and Sapphira's deaths (vv.12-13)
- B. There were more and more miracles, and many more were being added to the church (vv.14-16)
 - 1. God did special miracles through Peter, even healing the sick with his shadow (paralleled by Paul's handkerchiefs in Acts 19:12); this is certainly one fulfillment of Jesus' promise to the apostles that they would do even greater works than He had done on earth:

John 14:11-12: ¹¹*Believe Me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; or at least believe on the evidence of the **miracles** themselves.* ¹²*I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in Me will do what I have been doing. He **will do even greater things than these**, because I am going to the Father.*

- 2. "Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and **all of them were healed**" (v.16)
 - a) *ALL* were healed, just as it had been throughout Christ's earthly ministry
 - b) See Mat. 4:24; 8:16; 12:15; 14:36;

VIII. APOSTLES ARRESTED AND FREED

Acts 5:17-25: ¹⁷Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. ¹⁸They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. ¹⁹But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. ²⁰“Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people the full message of this new life.”

²¹At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people. When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles.

²²But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, ²³“We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.” ²⁴On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of this. ²⁵Then someone came and said, “Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.”

- A. “Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were **filled with jealousy**. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail” (vv.17-18)
1. This is starting to sound familiar: miracles, conversions, power and expansion—and great opposition and persecution!
 2. Here we are given clear insight into the motivation of the opposition: **jealousy**.
 3. At this point, we must pause and consider this reality once again: If we want to experience the power and revival the first church had, we must also be prepared to face persecution and suffering for His name.
- B. “But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out” (v.19)
1. Sometimes the Sovereign Lord would leave the apostles in prison until their captors released them (Acts 4:3, 7);
 2. Sometimes those imprisoned (James) were put to death (Acts 12:1-2);
 3. Here and at other times, those imprisoned (Peter) were set free by angels (Acts 12:3-10);

- C. Released from prison, the apostles were commanded by the angel to go right back to the temple courts and “tell the people the **full message of this new life**” (v.20)
1. MSG: “Tell them **everything there is to say** about this life.”
 2. The Christian faith isn’t just a set of creeds and doctrines, but a NEW LIFE—resurrection life in Christ; it would later be called “the Way” (see Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22).
- D. Finding the prison empty and the apostles back in the temple courts preaching to the people, the high priest and all of his cronies were “**perplexed**” (vv.21-25)
1. “Perplexed” [Gk. *diaporeo* = “to be thoroughly nonplussed;” “much perplexed and thoroughly at a loss about them” – AMP]
 2. All of the religious leaders’ attempts to stop this movement were failing; they would soon be warned by one of their own that they would not be able to stop these men, only finding themselves in a futile fight against God Himself (v.39)

IX. APOSTLES BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN AGAIN

Acts 5:26-33: ²⁶*At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them. ²⁷Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ²⁸“We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.”*

²⁹*Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than men! ³⁰The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging Him on a tree. ³¹God exalted Him to His own right hand as Prince and Savior that He might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. ³²We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God*

has given to those who obey Him.” ³³*When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death.*

- A. “At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them” (v.26)
 - 1. The officers used no force or violence to bring the apostles in because they feared the people
 - 2. This shows the high regard all of the people now had for the apostles
- B. The apostles were brought before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest: “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood” (vv.27-28)
 - 1. The high priest deliberately avoided mentioning the name of Jesus
 - 2. He inadvertently paid the apostles a great compliment on the success of their ministry—they had now *filled Jerusalem* with the message of Christ
 - 3. He accused them of trying to bring “this Man’s blood on us,” but the Jewish leaders had already done that when they cried, “Let His blood be on us and on our children” (Mat. 27:25)
- C. Peter once again (see Acts 4:19-20) explained why he and the other apostles could not follow the priests’ orders to stop preaching in Jesus’ name: “We must obey God rather than men!” (v.29)
- D. Having prayed for more boldness to speak the word in the face of threats and opposition (Acts 4:29-31), Peter unleashed thunderbolts in this, his third sermon recorded in Acts: “The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging Him on a tree. God exalted Him to His own right hand as Prince and Savior that He might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.” (vv.30-32)
 - 1. Any would-be preacher can learn a lot from these sermons so wonderfully preserved for us in the book of Acts—they are a true clinic in homiletics!

2. In just 65 words, Peter covered Christ’s crucifixion, resurrection and exaltation; he mentioned key principles such as repentance and forgiveness; and he explained how God had given His Holy Spirit only to those who obey Him
 3. How effective was his short sermon? The next verse tells it all...
- E. “When they heard this, they were **furious** and wanted to put them to death.” (v.33)
1. “Furious” [Gk. *diaprio* = “to saw asunder, exasperate, cut to the heart”]; although translated “cut to the heart” in the KJV, the NKJV has also changed it to “they were furious”
 2. This is a different Greek word from the one Luke used in Acts 2:38 that is there translated “cut to the heart;” true, the religious leaders were cut, but this was not producing in them a repentant heart that asks, “What shall we do?” Rather, it was “What are we going to do with these men?” (See Acts 4:16.) But now, for the first time, they had a different solution to the problem—they wanted to put them to death.

X. GAMALIEL’S WARNING

Acts 5:34-42: ³⁴*But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. ³⁵Then he addressed them: “Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. ³⁶Some time ago **Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing.** ³⁷After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. ³⁸Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. ³⁹But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”*

⁴⁰*His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing*

because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.⁴² Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

- A. Gamaliel intervened—he was one of the most distinguished of Israel’s rabbis, and the teacher of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 22:3). His advice does not indicate that he was a Christian or even pro-Christian—it was simply common sense, worldly wisdom.
- B. The heart of his speech: “Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For **if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men;** you will only find yourselves fighting against God.” (vv.38-39)
 - 1. Gamaliel referred to Theudas and Judas to prove that human personalities can rally a crowd for a while, but the best of human movements eventually die out.
 - 2. Gamaliel’s best advice was, “If this movement is not of God, leave it alone. It will die out like all other movements before it. **BUT IF IT IS FROM GOD** (Ps. 127; Rom. 8:28-39), you have a big problem!”
 - 3. The resistance they were already experiencing in trying to snuff out this “Jesus Movement” should have made them think, “Are we fighting against God?”
- C. Although they liked Gamaliel’s words, their bigoted, hateful hearts just couldn’t let them fully obey his counsel: “They called the apostles in and **had them flogged**. Then they **ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus**, and let them go.” (v.40)
 - 1. Gamaliel had specifically told them to “leave these men alone” and to refrain or withdraw from them (v.40)
 - 2. (MSG) “So I am telling you: **Hands off these men!** Let them alone.”
 - 3. Nevertheless, they still had them beaten and flogged before releasing them
 - 4. Yet again, they tried in vain to threaten them to stop talking about Jesus

5. How effective were the beatings and threats at stopping the apostles? They totally backfired...
- D. “The apostles left the Sanhedrin, **rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering** disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, **they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news** that Jesus is the Christ.” (vv.41-42)

XI. CONCLUSION

- A. In Acts chs.3-5, the Jerusalem church began to explode in power and numbers; God worked great signs and wonders through the apostles, creating even greater opportunities for them to boldly preach the Good News of Jesus to large audiences.
- B. But whenever God moves and His kingdom advances, expect opposition from the powers of darkness. From the outside, threats, persecution and even imprisonment came upon the church through the religious establishment; from the inside, Satan tried to infiltrate the growing church with lies and hypocrisy.
- C. But the church prayed for boldness and miracles, and God answered them—in the face of persecution, the apostles remained firm and steadfast, boldly and fearlessly preaching God’s word.
- D. And the church grew—more and more believers were being added to their number, and soon, even priests would be joining in large numbers (Acts 6:7).

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Part 5: Choosing the Seven (chs. 6-7)

(No. 1119.5 – 1/11/17 – NLC)

I. THE SEVEN CHOSEN

Acts 6:1-7: ¹*In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.* ²*So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.* ³*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* ⁴*and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”*

⁵*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.* ⁶*They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.* ⁷*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.*

- A. “In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the **Grecian Jews** among them **complained against the Hebraic Jews** because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.” (v.1)
1. A considerable length of time may have elapsed since the close of chapter 5.
 2. The church continued to see great growth and expansion, but more growing pains as well.
 3. If the devil cannot destroy by attacks from *without*, he will seek to overthrow by dissension *within*.
 4. Up until this time, the church had always been in one accord, marked by its incredible harmony and unity (see Acts 1:14; 2:46; 4:32); now it was being marred by discord

5. In the early days of the church, it was customary to make daily food distributions for the poor widows who had no other means of support.
 6. Some of the believers who had been Greek-speaking Jews complained because their widows were not receiving the same treatment as the widows of Hebrews (those from Jerusalem and Judea)
 7. NLT: “But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were **rumbblings of discontent.**”
 8. The flesh dies hard—how sadly these kinds of carnal bickering, factions and infightings surface in many churches, often ending in bitter divisions and splits:
Gal. 5:15-16 (NKJV): ¹⁵*But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!* ¹⁶*I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.*
 9. But God gave the apostles wisdom to resolve the situation.
- B. The twelve apostles realized that with the growth of the church, some provision had to be made for handling these business matters; they counseled the church to designate seven spiritual men to handle the food distribution (vv.2-3)
- C. Although these men are not designated **deacons** in the Bible, it is not unreasonable to think of them as such. In the expression, “wait on tables (v.2),” the Greek word used is *diakoneo*, the verb form of the noun from which we get the English word deacon, so their function literally was to “deacon” tables:
1. Gk. *diakonos* = to run on errands; an attendant, table waiter; a deacon or deaconess, minister, servant”
 2. Frequently translated “servant or minister in the New Testament, *diakonos* is only translated “deacon” or “deaconess” in 1 Tim. 3:8, 12; Phil. 1:1, Rom. 16: 1 (AMP).
 3. Acts 21:8 (AMP) refers to the Seven as “deacons”: “we went into the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of **the Seven [first deacons]**, and stayed with him.”
- D. “Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are **known to be full of the Spirit** and wisdom.” (v.3)
1. In the original text, the apostles specified **three qualifications** that the candidates had to meet:

2. NKJV: “Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of **good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom...**”

a) **Of good reputation** [Gk. *martureo* = “to be a witness, have a good (honest) report, be well reported of”] – they had to be faithful witnesses, men of proven character and with a good reputation and testimony

b) **Full of the Holy Spirit**

c) **Full of wisdom** (“good sense” – MSG)

d) Compare these with Paul’s list of qualifications for deacons given to Timothy:

1 Tim 3:8-12: ⁸*Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁹They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. ¹¹In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. ¹²A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well.*

3. These men were “**known** to be full of the Holy Spirit”

a) Although not specifically stated, they may have been in the original group of 120 believers filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost

b) In any event, there was no question or doubt about their spiritual condition! Are we *known to be full of the Holy Spirit* in our church community, or would people have to scratch their head and wonder, *Hmm, I’m not real sure about brother so and so!*

E. “We will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” (v.4)

1. KJV: “We will **give ourselves continually** to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.”

2. AMP: “We will continue **to devote ourselves steadfastly** to prayer and the ministry of the Word.”

3. The apostles had a clear understanding of their calling and ministry; there **MUST** be leaders like this in the church today who are dedicated and devoted to prayer and the word of God.
 4. The order here is significant—prayer *first*, then ministry!
- F. “This proposal pleased the whole group.” (v.5)
1. What marvelous grace and wisdom God bestowed on these apostles; judging from the names of the seven men who were chosen, the majority of them were Greek-speaking Jews
 2. This was a most gracious concession to the very group that had been complaining; there could be no charge of favoritism thereafter from the Grecians. When the love of God fills men’s hearts, it triumphs over pettiness and selfishness!
- G. “Select seven men “whom we may **appoint** over this business” (v.3 – KJV)
1. **Appoint** [Gk. *kathistemi* = “to place down (permanently); to designate, set, ordain”]
 2. Paul used the same word referring to the ordaining of elders (Tit. 1:5 – KJV): “*ordain* elders in every city”
 3. That these men were to be **ordained** to their ministry responsibility by the apostles is confirmed in v.6: “They presented these men to the apostles, who **prayed and laid their hands on them.**”
- H. “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)
1. This is one of many “progress reports” given by Luke from time to time throughout the book of Acts (see Acts 1:15; 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:31)
 2. The provision of deacons to care for business affairs resulted in a great forward thrust for the gospel.
 3. Perhaps the greatest miracle of grace was the large company of *priests* turning to Christ—the very ones who had once sought the destruction of Christ, His apostles, and His teaching.

II. STEPHEN SEIZED

Acts 6:8-15: ⁸Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.

⁹Opposition 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, ¹⁰but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.

¹¹Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen **speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God.**" ¹²So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. ¹³They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops **speaking against this holy place and against the law.**" ¹⁴For we have heard him say that this **Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.**" ¹⁵All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

A. "**Stephen**, a man full of God's grace and power, **did great wonders and miraculous signs** among the people." (v.8)

1. Only two of the deacons are well-known to us—**Stephen**, whose story begins here, and **Philip**, the evangelist who later carried the gospel to Samaria (Acts 8), won the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ, and entertained Paul at Caesarea. [Their names are listed 1st and 2nd in Acts 6:5.]
2. Stephen is the first man other than an apostle who is said to have performed miracles in the book of Acts. Was he promoted to some higher level or position as a result of his faithfulness in the menial tasks of serving widows? Or was it simply an additional ministry which he carried on while waiting tables? The Scriptures remain silent on this question.

B. "**Opposition arose**, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen." (v. 9)

1. This is, by now, becoming an all-too familiar pattern: God moves, opponents rise up.

2. The “Freedmen” or “Libertines” were perhaps Jews who had been freed from slavery by the Romans; they were from various places: Cyrene (a city in Africa), Alexandria (a seaport of Egypt), Cilicia and Asia (provinces of Asia Minor); they had a reputation of being very zealous Jews.
- C. “These men began to argue with Stephen, but they **could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit** by whom he spoke.” (vv.9-10)
1. The zealots were no match for Stephen for two reasons: his wisdom, and the Holy Spirit by whom he spoke
 2. The power, grace, and anointing that was upon Stephen’s life was irresistible
- D. Unable to win the debate, the Jews, in a desperate move to silence Stephen, secretly induced or bribed false witnesses to accuse him of blasphemy against Moses and God; soon Stephen was standing before the Sanhedrin, charged with speaking against the temple and the law, saying that Jesus would destroy the temple and change all of the customs handed down to Israel by Moses. (vv.10-14)
1. This is a very similar script to that of Jesus’ arrest and trial—false witnesses, accusations of blasphemy, etc.
 2. If you can’t win the argument, attack your opponent—this is a classic case of *ad hominem*, a Latin expression which literally means “to the man,” short for *argumentum ad hominem*; it is very common in modern politics whereby an argument is rebutted by attacking the character or motive of the person making the argument, rather than attacking the substance of the argument itself.
- E. “All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and **they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.**” (v.15)
1. Had the Sanhedrin heeded the warning given them by Gamaliel, they would have “left these men alone” (Acts 5:38) and quit while they were ahead!
 2. They must have already started feeling a bit uncomfortable at this point, interrogating this would-be blasphemer, all the while fixing their gaze on his angelic countenance.

3. No doubt, as Stephen was gazing into the face of Jesus Christ, his face was reflecting some of that glory for his Jewish attackers to behold (see 2 Cor. 3:13-18; 4:6; Acts 7:55-56)

III. STEPHEN'S SPEECH BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

- A. In this masterful speech—one of about 1,200 words that would only take 6 or 7 minutes to deliver— Stephen demonstrated his thorough knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures and the history of Israel. He would first show his listeners his familiarity and identification with the Jewish people (“our father Abraham,” “our fathers,” “our people,”) and his great love for the nation of Israel.
- B. He would use the stories of Joseph and Moses (types of the rejection of Christ), both chosen by God yet rejected by their own people, to show how in the past, Israel had rejected the very saviors God raised up to deliver them. This was to lead up to the story of Jesus, the Savior whom they had betrayed and murdered.
- C. He recounted the many times in their history that the Jewish people had been rebellious, stiff-necked, disobedient, turning to idols, even persecuting and killing the prophets God sent to them.
- D. Stephen would finish with this stinging indictment: “You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!”

Acts 7:1-53: ¹*Then the high priest asked him, “Are these charges true?”*

²*To this he replied: “Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran. ³‘Leave your country and your people,’ God said, ‘and go to the land I will show you.’⁴So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. ⁵He gave him no inheritance here, not even a foot of ground. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child.*

⁶*God spoke to him in this way: ‘Your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and*

mistreated four hundred years. ⁷But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,' God said, 'and afterward they will come out of that country and worship Me in this place.'⁸Then He gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.

⁹Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him ¹⁰and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt; so he made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.

¹¹"Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our fathers could not find food. ¹²When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers on their first visit. ¹³On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph's family. ¹⁴After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. ¹⁵Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our fathers died. ¹⁶Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.

¹⁷As the time drew near for God to fulfill His promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt greatly increased. ¹⁸Then another king, who knew nothing about Joseph, became ruler of Egypt. ¹⁹He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our forefathers by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die.

²⁰"At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for in his father's house. ²¹When he was placed outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. ²²Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

²³"When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites. ²⁴He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. ²⁵Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. ²⁶The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile

them by saying, ‘Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?’

²⁷But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, ‘Who made you ruler and judge over us?’ ²⁸Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’ ²⁹When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.

³⁰After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. ³¹When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to look more closely, he heard the Lord’s voice: ³²‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.’ Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.

³³“Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off your sandals; the place where you are standing is holy ground.’ ³⁴I have indeed seen the oppression of My people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.’

³⁵**This is the same Moses whom they had rejected** with the words, ‘Who made you ruler and judge?’ **He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God Himself**, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. ³⁶He led them out of Egypt and did wonders and miraculous signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the desert.

³⁷This is that Moses who told the Israelites, ‘God will send you a prophet like me from your own people.’ ³⁸He was in the assembly in the desert, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living words to pass on to us.

³⁹**But our fathers refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him** and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. ⁴⁰They told Aaron, ‘Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt—we don’t know what has happened to him!’ ⁴¹That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and held a celebration in honor of what their hands had made. ⁴²But God turned away and gave them over to the worship of the heavenly bodies. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets:

'Did you bring Me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the desert, O house of Israel? ⁴³You have lifted up the shrine of Molech and the star of your god Rephan, the idols you made to worship. Therefore I will send you into exile' beyond Babylon.

⁴⁴Our forefathers had the tabernacle of the Testimony with them in the desert. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. ⁴⁵Having received the tabernacle, our fathers under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, ⁴⁶who enjoyed God's favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷But it was Solomon who built the house for Him.

⁴⁸However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says: ⁴⁹'Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. What kind of house will you build for Me? says the Lord. Or where will My resting place be? ⁵⁰Has not My hand made all these things?'

⁵¹You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! ⁵²Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered Him— ⁵³you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it."

E. Stephen showed in a powerful way how history repeats itself—in every generation we can find the same pattern—people are the same:

1. When confronted with God's message, they do not understand (v.25)
2. When urged to live at peace, they refuse to listen (v.27)
3. When given a God-sent deliverer, they reject him (v.39)
4. When delivered miraculously from bondage or some other evil, they prefer useless idols to the merciful God (v.41)
5. Such is human nature—rebellious, ungrateful, foolish

F. But Stephen would also show how God is always the same:

1. The God who spoke to Moses was the same God who had spoken to his ancestors (v.32)

2. This God hears when people are oppressed and in trouble, and He comes to deliver (v.34)
3. He leads His people from bondage into freedom and abundance, from death to life (v.36)

G. In his speech, **Stephen was asked to answer the following charges:**

1. He had **blasphemed Moses and God** (Acts 6:11)—Stephen’s response: *they* had rejected Moses and refused to obey him (vv.25, 35, 39), rejecting and crucifying the Prophet that Moses had foretold (v.37) [see *Section II.G* of Part 4, p.43].
2. He had **spoken against the temple and the Law**, saying that Jesus would destroy the temple and the customs of Moses (Acts 6:13-14)—Stephen’s response: Israel had the tabernacle of Testimony in the wilderness, but during that same time they were worshiping false gods like Molech, Rephan, and the heavenly bodies (vv.42-44); he then quoted Solomon and Isaiah, who both stated that God doesn’t dwell in man-made temples (vv.47-50); Stephen also showed how the Law he had purportedly spoken against had never been honored or obeyed by the Jews—they had always stubbornly refused to follow the precepts that Moses had given them (vv.38-39, 53)

H. To conclude, **Stephen leveled his charges** against the Jewish Council:

1. “You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!” (v.51)
 - a) **Stiff-necked** – obstinate, stubborn, unyielding; like oxen that refused to be yoked
 - b) **Uncircumcised** – hard, calloused; circumcision was the very sign of being a Jew—this placed them in the same category as the uncircumcised Gentiles
 - c) **You always resist the Holy Spirit** – this new movement that they were attacking had begun on the day of Pentecost with the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy by a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit—it

wasn't *man* they were resisting—it was the *Holy Spirit Himself*

2. “Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered Him.” (v.52)

a) These words are reminiscent of some of the scathing rebukes Jesus spoke against the Pharisees and religious hypocrites when He was on earth (He never spoke this way to the adulterers, thieves and “sinners”):

Mat. 23:27-35: ²⁷*Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean.* ²⁸*In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.*

²⁹*Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, **you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous.*** ³⁰*And you say, “If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.”* ³¹*So you testify against yourselves that **you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets.*** ³²*Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!*

³³*You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?* ³⁴*Therefore **I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog*** in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. ³⁵*And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.*

b) The final prophet they murdered was God's Righteous One, Jesus Christ

3. “You who have received **the law** that was put into effect through angels but **have not obeyed it.**” (v.53)
4. **Acts 7:51-53 (MSG):** ⁵¹“*And you continue, so bullheaded! Calluses on your hearts, flaps on your ears! Deliberately ignoring the Holy Spirit, you’re just like your ancestors.* ⁵²*Was there ever a prophet who didn’t get the same treatment? Your ancestors killed anyone who dared talk about the coming of the Just One. And you’ve kept up the family tradition—traitors and murderers, all of you.* ⁵³*You had God’s Law handed to you by angels—gift-wrapped!—and you squandered it!*”

- I. Whew! Nothing more needed to be said! Indeed, nothing more could be said! They had sought to put Stephen on the defensive, but he became the prosecutor and they the guilty defendants. This would be one of God’s final messages to the Jewish people before the gospel started moving out to the Gentiles.

IV. THE STONING OF STEPHEN

Acts 7:54-60: ⁵⁴*When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.* 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.* ⁵⁶“*Look,*” he said, “*I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.*”

⁵⁷*At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him,* ⁵⁸*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.*

⁵⁹*While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”* ⁶⁰*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.*

- A. “When they heard this, **they were furious** and gnashed their teeth at him.” (v.54)
 1. One commentator has observed that if Stephen had just chosen his words a bit more carefully, things might have gone better for him!

2. This was not a lesson in political correctness—this was a man full of the Holy Spirit, boldly and fearlessly speaking God’s word (remember the prayer in Acts 4:29-31).
 3. **Furious** – from the same Greek word *diaprio* used in Acts 5:33 [see *Section IX.E* on p.65 of Part 4] which means “to saw asunder, exasperate, cut to the heart;” in the KJV it is translated “cut to the heart.”
 4. Basically, Stephen had just taken a Holy Ghost chainsaw to their stony hearts and they went off on him, grinding their teeth, which loosely translated, means, “We’re so mad we’re going to have this guy for dinner!”
- B. “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.” (v.55)
1. Note the stark contrast between the discomposure of the rejecters of the gospel (Stephen’s words had sawn them asunder, bringing as much torture to their souls as has ever been unleashed on Christian martyrs in their bodies) and the wonderful composure of Stephen (he had a face like an angel, was full of the Holy Spirit, and prayed for their forgiveness).
 2. He saw Jesus *standing* at the right hand of God;
 - a) Many Scriptures refer to Christ *sitting* at God’s right hand (Ps. 110:1-2; Mat. 26:64; Mark 16:19; Eph. 1:20; Heb. 1:3)
 - b) But Stephen saw Him *standing*; some believe that Jesus gets up from His throne in glory and stands to honor and welcome every martyr as they enter His heavenly kingdom!
- C. “At this they **covered their ears** and, **yelling** at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, **dragged him** out of the city and began to stone him.” (vv.57-58)
1. Like the stings of hornets or scorpions, Stephen’s words had brought such torment to their darkened minds that they went wild, yelling and screaming, rushing at him like madmen
 2. They covered their ears, but the ears of their hearts had long been sealed: “He that has ears to hear, let him hear.”

- D. “Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named **Saul**.” (v.58)
1. The Holy Spirit leaves a little sidebar, almost incidentally mentioning the name of a young man who stood guard over the clothes of Stephen’s executioners—Saul. God seemed to be saying, “Remember that name. You will hear it again!”
 2. Witnessing Stephen’s death had a profound effect on Paul, as he would later testify after his conversion:
Acts 22:20: And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.
- E. “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.” (vv.59-60)
1. Stephen’s death resembled that of Jesus in several ways:
 - a) He prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (v. 59). Jesus had prayed, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit” (Luke 23:46)
 - b) He prayed, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin” (v.60). Jesus had prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34)
- F. **Acts 7:54-60 (MSG):** ⁵⁴*At that point they went wild, a rioting mob of catcalls and whistles and invective.* ⁵⁵*But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, hardly noticed—he only had eyes for God, whom he saw in all His glory with Jesus standing at His side.* ⁵⁶*He said, “Oh! I see heaven wide open and the Son of Man standing at God’s side!”* ⁵⁷*Yelling and hissing, the mob drowned him out. Now in full stampede,* ⁵⁸*they dragged him out of town and pelted him with rocks. The ringleaders took off their coats and asked a young man named Saul to watch them.* ⁵⁹*As the rocks rained down, Stephen prayed, “Master Jesus, take my life.”* ⁶⁰*Then he knelt down, praying loud enough for everyone to hear, “Master, don’t blame them for this sin”—his last words. Then he died. Saul was right there, congratulating the killers.*

V. CONCLUSION

- A. Historians tell us that a considerable amount of time elapsed between Luke's account in Acts chapter 5 and that of chapter 6. The Jerusalem church continued to grow and, as with any church, this growth created new challenges and inevitable problems—both from within and without.
- B. The apostles began to organize various activities and ministries within the church, ordaining the first deacons. One of these was Stephen, a mighty man of God with a powerful ministry of signs and wonders.
- C. Opposition to the Way had been increasing in intensity, growing from threats and a night in jail in chapter 4, to imprisonment, threats, beatings and a desire to put the apostles to death in chapter 5. But in chapter 7, the jealousy and fury of the Jewish religious establishment reached a climax; they would produce the first martyr in the Christian church—Stephen.
- D. Another deacon, Philip, along with an even greater wave of persecution, would play a major role in the next phase of God's program—taking the gospel to Judea and Samaria...

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Part 6: Gospel Advances to Judea & Samaria (chs. 8-9)

(No. 1119.6 – 2/1/17 – NLC)

I. SAUL RAVAGES THE CHURCH

Acts 8:1-3: ¹And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ²Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

A. “And Saul was there, giving approval to his [Stephen’s] death. (v.1)

1. Saul was there – Luke keeps mentioning this name *Saul* because he is about to take center stage in God’s story.
2. **Giving approval** [Gk. *suneudokeo* = “to think well of; feel gratified with, be pleased, assent to”] – Saul’s approval was not a disinterested or mere mental assent to Stephen’s death—he took great delight in watching this Jesus fanatic being crushed beneath the stones of the Jewish zealots.

B. “On that day a **great persecution broke out** against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were **scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.**” (v.1)

1. On that day – Stephen’s death seemed to trigger a widespread attack on the church.
2. Great persecution broke out – all the believers were scattered, presumably because of fear, while the apostles remained in Jerusalem, apparently to brave the fury of their persecutors.
3. Historians estimate that by this time, 8-10 years had elapsed since the day of Pentecost, and the church had still not ventured out from Jerusalem with the gospel though Jesus had clearly laid out the strategy in Acts 1:8:
1) Jerusalem, 2) Judea & Samaria, 3) Uttermost parts of the

earth, they had apparently become quite comfortable having a Jewish church in Jerusalem.

4. God has His ways of stirring the nest and moving us out of our comfort zone—persecution *forced* them to move out from Jerusalem to—that’s right, *Judea* and *Samaria*!
- C. “Godly men **buried Stephen and mourned deeply** for him.” (v.2)
1. What brought glee and joy to Saul and his Jewish cohorts, pierced the hearts of the believers with sadness and deep lamentation.
 2. Christians grieve for loved ones, but “not like the rest of men who have no hope” beyond the grave (1 Thess. 4:13-14); believers are to “mourn with those who mourn” (Rom. 12:15); even Jesus wept at Lazarus’ tomb, an indication of how much He loved him (John 11:35-36).
 3. Jesus had warned His disciples about this before His own death:
John 16:20: *I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.*
- D. “But **Saul began to destroy the church**. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.” (v.3)
1. NKJV: “Saul **made havoc** of the church.”
 2. “Destroy” or “made havoc” – the Greek word used literally refers to ferocious wild animals seeking and devouring their prey.
 3. Something like a demonic obsession seemed to have overtaken Saul—we can only speculate, but Stephen’s death must have had a profound effect on him—seeing Stephen’s angelic face, his peaceful composure, and praying for his murderers to be forgiven.
 4. MSG: “And Saul just went wild, devastating the church, entering house after house after house, dragging men and women off to jail.”

II. PHILIP TAKES THE GOSPEL TO SAMARIA

Acts 8:4-8: ⁴Those who had been scattered **preached** the word wherever they went. ⁵Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. ⁶When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. ⁷With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. ⁸So there was great joy in that city.

- A. “Those who had been scattered **preached** the word wherever they went.” (v.4)
1. What Satan had devised to *exterminate* the church was used by the Sovereign God to *expand* the church! How this must infuriate the enemy!
 2. MSG: “Forced to leave home base, the Christians all became missionaries. Wherever they were scattered, they preached the Message about Jesus.”
 3. This is the first instance in the book of Acts where people other than the apostles were specifically said to be *preaching*—now *all* of the believers were evangelizing.
- B. The gospel breaks through racial divides (v.5)
1. There was a 1,000-year racial wall between the Jews and the Samaritans, which could be understood in the meeting between Jesus and the Samaritan woman:
John 4:9: *The Samaritan woman said to Him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)*
 2. Samaritans claimed descent from Jacob, and looked on themselves as true Israelites. Actually, they were of mixed Jewish and heathen descent. Mount Gerizim had been adopted as their official place of worship, a mountain in Samaria that was clearly visible to Jesus and the woman as they talked together at the well. The Jews had a deep dislike for the Samaritans. They considered them half-breeds—mongrel dogs.
 3. But the Jewish believers in Jerusalem were coming to understand that the gospel is for all nations, tribes, races

and colors—God so loved **the world** that He gave His only Son...

C. Philip's ministry in Samaria (vv.5-8)

1. One of the Seven, Philip is later called an evangelist:

Acts 21:8-9: *⁸Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of **Philip the evangelist**, one of the Seven. ⁹He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.*

2. Certainly what Paul later wrote to Timothy concerning deacons is applicable to Philip (and likewise to Stephen):

1 Tim. 3:13 (NKJV): *For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

3. He *proclaimed* (preached) Christ (v.5)

- a) **Proclaimed** [Gk. *kerusso* = “to herald (as a public crier)”]

- b) As a king's herald would go before him, proclaiming his edicts or announcing his coming, so Philip, as an ambassador to King Jesus, went to Samaria proclaiming Him.

4. As with Stephen, God confirmed Philip's ministry with many miraculous signs, healings, and deliverance from demonic oppression (vv.6-7)

III. SIMON THE SORCERER

Acts 8:9-25: *⁹Now 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,¹⁰ 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.”¹¹ They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic.¹² 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.¹³ Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.*

¹⁴When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.¹⁵ When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy

Spirit, ¹⁶because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money ¹⁹and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

²⁰Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! ²¹You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. ²²Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps He will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. ²³For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

²⁴Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me." ²⁵When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

A. **Simon the sorcerer** and his great influence on Samaria (vv.9-11)

1. Simon had practiced sorcery (magic). (v.9)
2. He had **amazed** ["bewitched" – KJV] all the people of Samaria, **boasting that he was someone great** (a sure sign he was false!) (v.10)
3. NOTE: If people don't worship the true God and they aren't amazed at Him, they will inevitably find something/someone else to worship and be amazed with!
4. **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. (vv.10-11)
5. It comes as no surprise that Samaria was filled with evil spirits, sicknesses and crippling diseases ("many" – v.7) due to the impact of Simon's witchcraft and sorcery.

B. When the **Samaritans believed** the good news and **were baptized**. (v.12)

1. "When they believed... they were baptized" – baptism is the first logical response to the gospel of the kingdom (see Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38).

2. As did Peter in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, it is obvious that Philip also taught on the importance of water baptism as he **preached the kingdom of God** to the Samaritans—they were all baptized.

C. The apostles **Peter and John sent to Samaria** (vv.14-17)

1. “When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.” (v.14)
 - a) Why was it necessary to send the apostles to Samaria? Philip obviously had a powerful ministry, gaining many converts, baptizing them, etc. What was he lacking?
 - b) As pointed out in *Section I.B.* on p.5 of Part 2, God gave a very special ministry to the apostles—it was their job to ensure that churches had the proper foundation; every church mentioned in Acts was founded by apostles (see Eph. 2:20; 1 Cor. 3:10).
 - c) Philip was an evangelist; it is apparent that in the early church, there was a clear understanding within the so-called 5-fold ministry (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers – Eph. 4:11) of the “division of labor” as well as the boundaries or limitations for each ministerial office.
2. They prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the **Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them**; they **had simply been baptized** into the name of the Lord Jesus. (vv.15-16)
3. The Samaritans had believed in Christ, received healing and deliverance, taken water baptism, and the whole city was full of great joy...
4. **BUT THEY HAD NOT YET RECEIVED THE HOLY SPIRIT!!!** This clearly refutes the popular teaching that as soon as a person puts their faith in Christ, they get the whole package—they are automatically filled with the Holy Spirit. These Samaritans still lacked an important experience in their journey of faith—they needed to *receive the Holy Spirit*.
5. It was only when “Peter and John placed their hands on them, [and] they received the Holy Spirit. (v.17)

D. **Simon the sorcerer** rebuked by Peter

1. Simon had also believed and taken baptism, astonished by the miracles he saw God performing through Philip (v.13); but there is no mention of him receiving the Holy Spirit.
2. After seeing the Holy Spirit come upon the believers through the laying on of hands by the apostles, Simon wanted to buy the gift that the apostles had. (vv.18-19)
3. Peter rebuked Simon for thinking he “could buy the gift of God,” telling him he had “no part or share in this ministry, because **your heart is not right** before God.” (vv.20-21)
4. Peter then exhorted Simon: “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.” (vv.22-23)
5. It is not clear whether Simon’s faith had been sincere or if he had been truly born again. One commentator writes, “Simon was a *professor* but not a *possessor* of salvation.” It seems he had just gone through the motions.
6. What was particularly wicked about Simon’s sin was that **he wanted to use the gift of God to advance his own agenda and draw more attention to himself** (VERY DANGEROUS!), as we can see from his request: “Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” (v.19)
7. In any event, Peter told Simon to repent and pray.
8. Then Simon answered, “**Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me.**” (v.24)
 - a) Like Pharaoh or King Saul, Simon seemed more concerned with being relieved of God’s heavy hand of judgment that was upon him than with changing his character and evil ways.
 - b) Nothing more is said about Simon in Scripture, so we can only speculate as to his sincerity and the final outcome in his life.

E. Peter and John returned to Jerusalem (v.25)

1. “When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.”
2. The apostles now realized they were in Phase 2 of the Acts 1:8 commission—they were witnesses in Samaria.

IV. PHILIP AND THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

Acts 8:26-40: ²⁶Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” ²⁷So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

³⁰Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

³¹“How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

³²The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture: “He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so He did not open His mouth. ³³In His humiliation He was deprived of justice. Who can speak of His descendants? For His life was taken from the earth.”

³⁴The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” ³⁵Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

³⁶As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?”

³⁷[Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” The eunuch answered, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”] ³⁸And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. ³⁹When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰Philip,

however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

- A. “Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “**Go south to the road—the desert road**—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (v.26)
1. How many preachers would be willing to leave a place that is in full-blown, red hot revival, to go out into the desert—for one man!
 2. Philip had in Samaria what every pastor dreams of—“crowds” coming to hear him preach, numerous conversions, miracles, and baptisms.
 3. And the Lord said, “Go.”
- B. “So he started out, and on his way he met an **Ethiopian eunuch**, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians.” (v.27)
1. *So he started out* – with unquestioning obedience, Philip did as he was instructed.
 2. He met an Ethiopian... this one man was the entire reason for what, at least on the surface, appeared to be a detour for Philip’s ministry;
 3. God loves people—crowds, small groups of people—He seems to have the same love for one solitary person.
 4. And this was no ordinary person—the Ethiopian man was a top-ranking official for the queen in his country—hand-picked by God to take the good news of Jesus Christ to the whole nation of Ethiopia! The gospel net continues to widen, now including Judea, Samaria, and Ethiopia!
 5. We are about to witness what can be called a “Divine Appointment”—Philip’s meeting with this man had been supernaturally arranged by the Sovereign God.
- C. “This man had **gone to Jerusalem to worship**, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot **reading the book of Isaiah** the prophet.” (vv.27-28)
1. Apparently a convert to Judaism, for he had gone to Jerusalem to worship.

2. Perfect timing by the Holy Spirit—just as Philip arrived, the eunuch was reading Isaiah—coincidence? Not a chance!
- D. “The Spirit told Philip, ‘Go to that chariot and stay near it.’ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ Philip asked. ‘How can I,’ he said, ‘unless someone explains it to me?’ So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.” (vv.29-31)
1. How wonderfully God opens doors and hearts when His Spirit is at work; with one friendly question, Philip suddenly found himself riding in the chariot of the Treasurer of Ethiopia!
 2. And what a beautiful setup: “How can I understand unless someone explains it to me?”
- E. The eunuch *just happened* to be reading **Isaiah 53**, which gives a graphic description of the suffering Messiah: “He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so He did not open his mouth. In His humiliation He was deprived of justice. Who can speak of His descendants? For His life was taken from the earth.” (vv.32-33)
- F. “The eunuch asked Philip, ‘Tell me, please, **who is the prophet talking about**, himself or someone else?’ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. (vv.34-35)
- G. **Ethiopian believed and was baptized** (vv.36-39)
1. We’re not given the details of what Philip spoke, but in the course of his preaching, it is apparent once again that Philip spoke clearly about the importance of water baptism.
 2. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?” (v.36)
 3. “[Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ The eunuch answered, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’]” (v.37)
 4. “And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch **went down into the water** and Philip

baptized him. When they **came up out of the water...**"
(vv.38-39)

- a) Note the simplicity of the ceremony—they were not in a temple, the church was not present—they were out in the desert!
- b) That the baptism was by **immersion** is evident by the expressions, *went down into the water* and *came up out of the water*. [For more on baptism, see *Section VI.H.2* on p.33, Part 3.]

H. “The **Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away**, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared at **Azotus** and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.” (vv.39-40)

1. Philip was miraculously and supernaturally translated through the air, snatched up in full view of the Ethiopian:
2. NAS: “When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord **snatched Philip away**.”
3. “Snatched away” or “taken suddenly” is the same Greek word *harpazo* which Paul uses in 1 Thess. 4:17 (translated “caught up”) to refer to the Rapture of the church:
4. **1 Thess. 4:16-17**: ¹⁶*For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.* ¹⁷*After that, we who are still alive and are left will be **caught up** together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.*
5. Azotus was 30 miles away from Gaza!
6. The Ethiopian went on his way **rejoicing** (v.39)

V. SAUL’S CONVERSION

Acts 9:1-19: ¹*Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.* ³*As he neared*

Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?”

⁵“Who are You, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” He replied. ⁶“Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

⁷The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

¹⁰In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!” “Yes, Lord,” he answered.

¹¹The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹²In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”

¹³“Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem.

¹⁴And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on Your name.”

¹⁵But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is My chosen instrument to carry My name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. ¹⁶I will show him how much he must suffer for My name.”

¹⁷Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁸Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

A. Chapter 9 marks a distinct turning point in Acts. Up until now, the apostle Peter had been the prominent leader of the church in Jerusalem. But from this point on, the apostle Paul gradually becomes the foremost figure and the gospel goes increasingly out to the Gentiles.

1. Saul of Tarsus was perhaps in his early thirties at this time.

2. He was generally regarded by the rabbis as one of the most promising young men in Judaism.
 3. As to zeal, he outstripped all of his fellows.
- B. “Meanwhile, Saul was **still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples**. (v.1)
1. KJV: “Breathing out threatenings and slaughter...”
 2. AMP: “Still drawing his breath hard from threatening and murderous desire...”
 3. Saul’s obsession with destroying the Christian church continues.
- C. “He went to the high priest and **asked him for letters** to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who **belonged to the Way**, whether men or women, he might **take them as prisoners** to Jerusalem.” (vv.1-2)
1. **Asked for letters** (authorizing him)
 2. MSG: “And got arrest warrants...”
 3. **The Way** – a name commonly used for the Christians in the early church (see also Acts 16:17; 18:25-26; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22)
 4. **Damascus**, located in the Roman province of **Syria**, was about 150 miles from Jerusalem (4-6 days’ journey); it had a large Jewish population, and apparently many Christian converts as a result of the believers who had been scattered from Jerusalem and taken the gospel there. (Acts 8:4).
- D. “As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a **light from heaven flashed** around him. **He fell to the ground** and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, **why do you persecute Me?**’” (vv.3-4)
1. Paul would later fill in more details about the event in his own personal accounts:
Acts 22:3-11: [To the crowd in Jerusalem after being arrested]: *³I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. ⁴I persecuted the followers of*

this Way to their death [there were many more martyrs after Stephen], *arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison,* ⁵*as also the high priest and all the Council can testify. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.*

⁶*About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. ⁷I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, “Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute Me?”*

⁸*“Who are You, Lord?” I asked. “I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,” He replied. ⁹My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of Him who was speaking to me. ¹⁰“What shall I do, Lord? I asked. “Get up,” the Lord said, “and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.” ¹¹My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the **brilliance of the light had blinded me.**”*

Acts 26:9-15: [Before Agrippa]: ⁹**I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth.** ¹⁰*And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. ¹¹Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them. ¹²On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. ¹³About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, **brighter than the sun,** blazing around me and my companions. ¹⁴We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” ¹⁵Then I asked, “Who are You, Lord?” “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” the Lord replied.”*

2. “Suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.”
 - a) How suddenly God can appear and change everything!
 - b) Paul described this light as brighter than the sun.
 - c) The brilliance of the light blinded him for 3 days. (v.9)

3. **“He fell to the ground.”**
 - a) As King Nebuchadnezzar learned (the hard way!), “No one can hold back His hand... and **those who walk in pride He is able to humble.**” (Dan. 4:35-37)
 - b) Of King Saul, David lamented, “How the mighty have fallen!” (2 Sam. 1:19)
 - c) Now, Saul of Tarsus, who had taken such delight in seeing Stephen fallen to his knees about to die (Acts 7:60), found himself prostrate on the ground beneath the mighty hand of God!
 4. **“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?”**
 - a) “Saul, Saul” – only 1 of 7 instances in Scripture where God repeated an individual’s name twice (Gen. 22:11 (Abraham); 46:2 (Jacob); Ex. 3:4 (Moses); 1 Sam. 3:10 (Samuel); Luke 10:41 (Martha); 22:31 (Simon Peter);
 - b) Saul was about to learn a very important truth: To persecute the church (Christians) is to persecute Christ, for the church is His body (see 1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 1:22-23; Mat. ch.25)
 - c) Pain inflicted on the members of His body on earth is felt by the Head in heaven!
- E. **“Who are You, Lord?”** Saul asked. **“I am Jesus,** whom you are persecuting,” he replied. (v.5)
1. Saul seemed to answer his own question: **Who are You, LORD?** [Gk. *kurios* = “supreme in authority; by implication, God, Lord, master”]
 2. But the next words he heard removed any doubt: “I am Jesus.” How simple: “I am Jesus.” Saul met Jesus! That is the essence of Christianity—it’s not merely embracing a creed or agreeing with a system of thought—it’s an *encounter* with the Living Christ!
 3. It is hard to imagine Saul’s thoughts and emotions here, but up until this point, he had been fully convinced that Jesus was dead—the leader of the hated “Way” sect—and he had been doing everything in his power to exterminate all of its followers.

4. Now Saul was learning that this same Jesus was not dead— He was alive and speaking to him from heaven—and he had been persecuting Him. *Oops... I'm in real trouble!*
- F. “Now get up and go into the city, and **you will be told what you must do.**” (v.6)
1. From this point onward, Saul would be taking orders from the Lord Jesus!
 2. Jesus could have informed Saul at once what was His will concerning him; but He chose to make him wait to receive further instructions from one of those very disciples whom he was going to drag off to prison in Jerusalem. That disciple would be the means of Saul’s salvation.
 3. Although God’s intention was to raise Saul up to become the mighty apostle Paul, He wanted to teach him an invaluable lesson: there are no “lone rangers” in the kingdom of God, and every member of Christ’s body needs the other members (see 1 Cor. 12).
- G. “The **men traveling with Saul stood there speechless**; they heard the sound but did not see anyone.” (v.7)
1. AMP: “The men who were accompanying him were **unable to speak [for terror]**, hearing the voice but seeing no one.”
 2. God made sure there were witnesses to this dramatic event; we learn 3 important details by looking at both Luke’s and Paul’s accounts:
 - a) All of Saul’s traveling companions heard the sound but did not understand the voice speaking to Saul; (v.7)
 - b) All of Saul’s traveling companions saw the light; (Acts 22:9)
 - c) All of Saul’s traveling companions fell to the ground. (Acts 26:14)
 3. Saul’s companions were on the same mission he was on— to persecute and imprison the Christians in Damascus; but there is no indication that any of them got converted, though they were also struck down, saw the bright light, and heard the sound of Christ’s voice!

- H. “For three days he was **blind**, and **did not eat or drink anything**.” (v.9)
1. The “three days” may be a coincidence, but it reminds us of Jonah’s 3 days in the belly of the great fish (Mat. 12:40) which he describes as the “belly of hell” (Jonah 2:2), and which is a type of Christ spending 3 days and nights in the grave.
 2. We can only speculate, but likely Saul was in the darkness and torment of hell for those 3 days, suffering God’s terrors for all of his sins.
- I. “In Damascus there was a disciple named **Ananias**. The Lord called to him in a vision, ‘Ananias!’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ he answered. The Lord told him, ‘Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and **ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying**. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to **restore his sight**.’” (vv.10-12)
1. God had this one all planned out!
 2. Ananias was an otherwise unknown, ordinary disciple—like you and me! That’s what’s so beautiful about this story—God chose to use a simple, regular guy like Ananias to pray for Saul’s (the future apostle Paul!) healing, baptize him in water, and help him receive the Holy Spirit!
 3. Thank God for simple disciples like Ananias who say “Yes” when the Lord calls!
- J. “Lord,” Ananias answered, “**I have heard many reports about this man** and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on Your name.” (vv.13-14)
1. Saul’s reputation was known far and wide—the poor saints in Damascus were trembling like defenseless lambs at the approach of a ravaging wolf.
 2. But God has many ways of delivering His people out of trouble— sometimes He does it by a change wrought in their persecutors—Saul’s conversion was their salvation.
- K. “But the Lord said to Ananias, ‘**Go!** This man is My **chosen instrument** to carry My name before the **Gentiles** and their

kings and before the **people of Israel**. I will show him **how much he must suffer** for My name.” (vv.15-16)

1. God revealed to *Ananias*, not Saul, the basic outline of Saul’s future life and ministry: he would primarily be the apostle to the Gentiles, his commission would bring him before kings, and he would also preach to his fellow Israelites, but from them he would suffer the keenest persecution.
2. “My chosen instrument to **carry My name**”
 - a) How simple: each one of us is chosen by God to carry the name of Jesus wherever we go.
 - b) Whether we are a nurse, business owner, mechanic or teacher (we should be doing what we are *skilled at* and *passionate about*), the most important thing is to **carry the name of Jesus** with us!
3. “How much he must suffer for My name.”
 - a) Instead of inflicting pain and suffering on Christ’s followers (as he done in the past), Saul would now be on the receiving end of that persecution.
 - b) Paul gave a partial list of some of his sufferings in 2 Cor. 11:23-33.
- L. “Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and **be filled with the Holy Spirit**.’ Immediately, something like **scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again**. He got up and **was baptized**.” (vv.17-18)
 1. “Brother Saul” – how gracious was this Ananias, acknowledging not his Jewish brother, but his brother in Christ, for Saul had now joined the family of the redeemed!
 2. In Christ’s commission to Ananias, there was only mention of laying on his hands to restore Saul’s sight; but Ananias added two other integral parts of the gospel message (see Acts 2:38): be **baptized** and **receive the Holy Spirit** (Jesus didn’t have to tell him because those commands are implicit in the gospel commission).

3. “Something like **scales** fell from Saul’s eyes and he could see again.”
 - a) It seems that the brightness of the light that Saul had seen literally burned the cornea of his eyes.
 - b) In any event, amazing grace was now removing his Pharisaical blindness, enabling him to see—really see!

M. In Paul’s testimony given later in Jerusalem, he would add a few details in his dramatic and amazing conversion story:

Acts 22:12-16: ¹²A man named **Ananias** came to see me. He was a **devout observer of the law** and **highly respected by all the Jews** living there. ¹³He stood beside me and said, “Brother Saul, receive your sight!” And at that very moment I was able to see him. ¹⁴Then he said: “The God of our fathers has chosen you **to know His will** and to **see the Righteous One** and to **hear words from His mouth**. ¹⁵You will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on His name.”

VI. SAUL IN DAMASCUS AND JERUSALEM

Acts 9:19-31: Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. ²⁰At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. ²¹All 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?” ²²Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.

²³After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him, ²⁴but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. ²⁵But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

²⁶When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. ²⁷But 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. ²⁸So Saul stayed with

them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹*He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him.* ³⁰*When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.*

³¹*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.*

- A. “**At once he began to preach in the synagogues** that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?” Yet **Saul grew more and more powerful** and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.” (vv.20-22)
1. Saul wasted no time obeying Christ’s call—he began to preach Jesus!
 2. His changed life was a compelling testimony to everyone.
- B. Persecution rapidly arose in Damascus, the Jews there conspiring to kill Saul, but he escaped safely to Jerusalem in a basket (see 2 Cor. 11:32-33). (vv.23-25)
- C. “When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but **they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple**. 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.” (vv.26-28)
1. So amazing was the miracle of Saul’s conversion that it was difficult for the other Christians to believe that it was true.
 2. Barnabas played a key role in getting the apostles in Jerusalem to accept Saul, and he would play a much bigger role later on in Paul’s ministry. There is no more mention of Saul until Acts 13. Peter is the center of focus until then.
- D. “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.**” (v.31)

VII. AENEAS AND DORCAS

Acts 9:32-43: ³²As **Peter** traveled about the country, he went to visit the saints in Lydda. ³³There he found a man named Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years. ³⁴“Aeneas,” Peter said to him, “Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your mat.” Immediately Aeneas got up. ³⁵All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

³⁶In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor. ³⁷About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. ³⁸Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, “Please come at once!”

³⁹Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them. ⁴⁰Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, “Tabitha, get up.” She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. ⁴¹He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive. ⁴²This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. ⁴³Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

- A. God used another healing miracle (Aeneas) in Peter’s ministry to expand the gospel message (vv.32-25)
 - 1. Aeneas, who had been bedridden for 8 years, was instantly and miraculously healed.
 - 2. “All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him [Aeneas] and turned to the Lord.” (v.35)
- B. The first recorded instance in the early church of a dead person being raised to life results in many more being added to the church (vv.36-43)
 - 1. Dorcas was raised to life by Peter.
 - 2. “This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.” (v.42)

VIII. SUMMARY

- A. In Acts 8 & 9, persecution of the early church continued to intensify, but the Sovereign God showed how He is always in control—sometimes He uses persecution to scatter His people to new places—at other times, He miraculously changes the *persecutor* (Saul) to become a champion for the faith.
- B. The gospel net continued to expand, now including Judeans, Samaritans, Ethiopians, Syrians, and soon... all of the Gentile nations.
- C. Another important truth in these chapters is that **God uses ordinary people** like Philip and Ananias to accomplish awesome things—this should be a great encouragement to us all.
- D. Saul, aka Paul, is now center stage—in a few more chapters, Paul will be the predominant church leader until the conclusion of Acts.
- E. From Paul's conversion, we can identify **7 marks or evidences of a true Christian conversion**:
 - 1. He met Jesus (Acts 9:4-6) and heard His voice—he had a personal encounter with the risen Christ;
 - 2. He humbled himself (fell to the ground) and began to take orders from the *Lord*—he longed to know the Lord's will and obey Him: “Who are You... what do You want me to do?” (Acts 9:6)
 - 3. He began to pray—he was helpless & totally dependent on God; (Acts 9:11)
 - 4. He received his sight, was baptized & received the Holy Spirit; (Acts 9:17-18)
 - 5. He united with other believers in fellowship; (Acts 9:19)
 - 6. He immediately began to testify & preach Christ; (Acts 9:20)
 - 7. He grew in grace and strength; (Acts 9:22)
- F. In the next chapter, the camera is focused back on Peter and the next quantum leap for the gospel—the Gentiles!

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Part 7: Gentile Church is Born (chs. 10-12)

(No. 1119.7 – 3/15/17 - NLC)

I. INTRODUCTION: SALVATION FOR THE GENTILES

- A. God’s opening the door of salvation to the Gentiles was a monumental event; it is clear from the amount of attention Luke gives in Acts to this historic happening that it was a *big deal*! In his letter to the Galatians, Paul explains that ever since the call of Abram out of the Ur of the Chaldees (Gen. 12:1-3), God had been planning to bring the light of salvation to the Gentiles (non-Israelite nations):

Gal. 3:8-9: *⁸The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” ⁹So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.*

- B. As Luke chronicles the events found in Acts 10, we can begin to understand that Peter and others with him realized that the wait (of centuries!) was over—the time of the Gentiles had finally arrived. They would soon be praising God, declaring that “God has granted **even the Gentiles** repentance unto life.”

II. CORNELIUS CALLS FOR PETER

Acts 10:1-8: *¹At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. ²He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. ³One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, “Cornelius!” ⁴Cornelius stared at him in fear.*

“What is it, Lord?” he asked. The angel answered, “Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. ⁵Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. ⁶He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea.”

⁷When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. ⁸He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

A. **Cornelius**—a devout, God-fearing Roman centurion (vv.1-2)

1. As a centurion, he had command of about one hundred soldiers.
2. The first Gentile that Jesus had dealings with was also a centurion, well-respected by the Jewish people because of his love for their nation, having built a synagogue for them (Luke 7:1-10);
3. Cornelius was respected by all the Jewish people too (Acts 10:22), well known for his generosity (probably toward the Jewish people as well as others);
4. It is therefore not a coincidence that these two men are singled out by the Lord; they are both examples of what God promised to Abraham: “I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse” (Gen. 12:3). They had blessed Israel, and in return, God blessed them.
5. Cornelius was an honorable man who, though not yet saved (see Acts 11:14), was walking faithfully in the light that had been given him through his conscience; as Paul would later explain, he was a Gentile, though not having the law, he did by nature the things required by the law:

Rom. 2:13-15: ¹³For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. ¹⁴(Indeed, when **Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law,** ¹⁵since **they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.**)

6. Cornelius was devout, God-fearing, gave generously to the needy, and prayed regularly.
7. God would soon give him the light of salvation through the apostle Peter.

- B. Cornelius' prayers and gifts came up before God and received God's attention (v.4).
- C. With unquestioning obedience, the centurion sent off two of his servants and one soldier to bring Simon Peter from Joppa (vv.5-8).

III. PETER'S VISION

Acts 10:9-23: ⁹About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹²It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air.

¹³Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." ¹⁴"Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." ¹⁵The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." ¹⁶This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

¹⁷While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. ¹⁸They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there. ¹⁹While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. ²⁰So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them." ²¹Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?"

²²The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a **righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people.** A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say." ²³Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

- A. In a vision, Peter saw all kinds of animals, both clean and unclean according to the ceremonial law (see Lev.11), and was commanded to eat them (vv.9-13).

- B. **“Surely not, Lord!”** Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.” (v.14)
1. Observance of the Mosaic laws of clean and unclean was so deeply ingrained in Peter’s mind that he refused to obey the Lord, saying: “Surely not, Lord!”
 - a) Whoever says “surely not” should never add “Lord,” and whoever truly says “Lord” will never say “surely not.”
 - b) Human nature is very slow to let go of old religious traditions, even when it is the *Lord* telling us to do so.
 2. Peter boasted about his perfect record in the matter of eating only kosher food.
- C. This prompted the voice to speak to him a second (and third) time, **“Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”** (v.15)
1. Jesus had already laid the groundwork for the eventual removal of the laws of clean and unclean foods:

Mark 7:14-23: ¹⁴*Again Jesus called the crowd to Him and said, “Listen to Me, everyone, and understand this.* ¹⁵*Nothing outside a man can make him ‘unclean’ by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him ‘unclean.’”* ¹⁶*[If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.]*

¹⁷*After He had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples asked Him about this parable.* ¹⁸*“Are you so dull?” He asked. “Don’t you see that **nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him ‘unclean’?** ¹⁹For it doesn’t go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body.” **(In saying this, Jesus declared all foods “clean.”)** ²⁰He went on: **“What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’** ²¹For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²²greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³All these evils come from inside and make a man “unclean.””*
 2. But it is clear that Peter’s vision had deeper significance than the mere matter of clean and unclean foods. True, with

the coming of the New Covenant, these regulations concerning foods would no longer be in effect:

1 Tim. 4:3-5: ³*They [false teachers] forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from **certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving** by those who believe and who know the truth.* ⁴*For **everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,*** ⁵*because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.*

3. But the real significance of the vision was this: God was about to open the door of faith to the Gentiles (see v.28). As a Jew, Peter had always looked upon the Gentiles as unclean, as aliens, as strangers, as far off, as godless. But now God was going to do a new thing (see Eph. 2:11-19). Gentiles (represented by the unclean beasts and birds) were going to receive the Holy Spirit in the same way the Jews (clean beasts and birds) had already received Him. National and religious distinctions were to be dissolved, and all true believers in the Lord Jesus would be on the same level in the Christian fellowship.
- D. While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius arrived “right then” (Acts 11:11) at the house looking for him; the Holy Spirit informed Peter that He had sent the visitors (vv.17-20).
 1. Perfect timing—the Sovereign Lord was in control of every detail!
 2. Peter was then directed to go down and meet the men who were looking for him.
- E. Peter then learned how an angel of God had directed Cornelius to send for Peter to come and speak to his entire household (vv.21-22) a “message through which he and his household would be saved” (Acts 11:14).
- F. “Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.” (v.23)
 1. Taking Gentiles into his house was contrary to the accepted Jewish practice (see v.28).
 2. By providing lodging for them, Peter was already taking the first step toward accepting Gentiles.

IV. PETER AT CORNELIUS' HOUSE

Acts 10:23-33: *The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went along.²⁴ The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.²⁵ As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence.²⁶ But Peter made him get up. “Stand up,” he said, “I am only a man myself.”*

²⁷*Talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people.²⁸ He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean.²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?”*

³⁰*Cornelius answered: “Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me³¹ and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor.³² Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.’³³ So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”*

- A. “The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went along.” (v.23)
 - 1. The “brothers” who accompanied Peter were six “circumcised believers” (see Acts 10:45; 11:12).
 - 2. God made sure there were a number of eyewitnesses to what was about to happen in Caesarea.
- B. Cornelius fell at Peter’s feet in reverence, but Peter humbly refused such treatment (vv.25-26).
 - 1. Worship is never fitting for men or angels— if only the self-appointed papal “successors” of Peter would forbid their followers to kneel before them!
 - 2. As he had previously done after the healing of the lame beggar (Acts 3:12), Peter quickly deflected any praise or worship, commanding Cornelius: “Stand up,” he said, I am only a man myself.”

C. “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But **God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean.**” (v.28)

1. Peter reminded his audience that he would not ordinarily have visited a Gentile house like this one.
2. Peter recognized that his vision had deeper significance than declaring all *foods* clean—he understood that God had now broken down the barrier between Jew and Gentile:

Eph. 2:11-19: ¹¹*Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men)—*¹²*remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.* ¹³*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.* ¹⁴*For He Himself is our peace, who has **made the two one and has destroyed the barrier**, the dividing wall of hostility,* ¹⁵*by abolishing in His flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to **create in Himself one new man out of the two**, thus making peace,* ¹⁶*and in this **one body** to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility.* ¹⁷*He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.* ¹⁸*For through Him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.* ¹⁹*Consequently, you are **no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household...***

D. Cornelius explained his vision and why he had asked Peter to come and address the gathering in his house (vv.29-33).

V. GENTILES HEAR THE GOOD NEWS

Acts 10:34-43: ³⁴*Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism* ³⁵*but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right.* ³⁶*You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.* ³⁷*You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the*

baptism that John preached—³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with Him.

³⁹“We are witnesses of everything He did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed Him by hanging Him on a tree, ⁴⁰but God raised Him from the dead on the third day and caused Him to be seen. ⁴¹He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead. ⁴²He 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. ⁴³All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.”

A. “Then **Peter** began to speak: ‘I now realize how true it is that **God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation** who fear him and do what is right.’” (vv.34-35)

1. This was a profound statement, for Peter and all of the Jewish people had believed for centuries that *they* alone were God’s favored people (and rightly so)—but something had changed dramatically—God would now accept men **from every nation!**
2. Christ had promised the keys of the kingdom of heaven to Peter (Mat. 16:19); Peter would now use those keys to open the door of faith to the Gentiles! What a privilege.
3. Contrary to what some teach, Peter was *NOT* saying that all God-fearing, righteous men and women (like Cornelius) are automatically saved apart from knowledge of Jesus Christ and faith in His substitutionary sacrifice—Cornelius and his household needed to first hear the message of the gospel in order to be saved (see Acts 11:14).
4. Even if a man fears God and works righteousness, he is not thereby saved. Salvation is only by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But when God finds a man who has lived up to the light he has received about the Lord, He makes sure that the man hears the gospel and thus has the opportunity to be saved.

- B. Acts 10:36-43 marks the fifth and final sermon of Peter recorded for us in the Book of Acts, containing many of the same elements already noted in previous sermons:
1. The message of the gospel had been sent *first* to the people of Israel, although the residents of Caesarea had undoubtedly heard about the fame of Christ as well (v.36).
 2. Jesus is Lord of all and God's anointed One—He brought good news of peace, doing good and healing everyone (vv.37-38).
 3. The Jews killed Jesus, but God raised Him from the dead, and we are witnesses (vv.39-41).
 4. All the prophets testified about Jesus, and God has appointed Him as Judge of all (vv.42-43).
 5. Now *everyone* (not just Jews) who believe in Him will receive forgiveness of sins through His name (v.43).

VI. THE HOLY SPIRIT FALLS ON THE GENTILES

Acts 10:44-48: ⁴⁴While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. ⁴⁵The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, ⁴⁷“Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” ⁴⁸So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

- A. “While Peter was still speaking these words, the **Holy Spirit came on all** who heard the message.” (v.44)
1. “While Peter was still speaking...” – no altar call was made, no hands were laid, no soft background music was playing—the Holy Spirit fell on everyone!
 2. “Came on” [Gk. *epiipto* = “to seize (with more or less violence): to fall (on, upon), lie on, press upon”]—similar to what happened on the day of Pentecost, as Peter would later explain (see Acts 11:15).

- B. “The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were **astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.**” (v.45)
1. “Astonished” [Gk. *existemi* = “to be put out of wits, or become astounded, insane: to be amazed, surprised, beside oneself”].
 2. Cornelius and the others had not become Jewish proselytes—these were uncircumcised Gentiles filled with the Spirit of God—this was absolutely crazy!
 3. The early Jewish Christians were very slow to understand or accept that the gospel was for the Gentiles as well as for the Jews.
 4. Paul would later write that this was a “mystery” understood only by revelation:
Eph. 3:2-6: ²*Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you, ³that is, the **mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. ⁴In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵which was **not made known to men in other generations** as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets. ⁶**This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.*****
- C. “**For they heard them speaking in tongues** and praising God.” (v.46)
1. How did the Jewish believers know that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been given to the Gentiles?
 2. The text clearly states that it was *because* they heard them speaking in tongues.
 3. “For” [Gk. *gar* = “assigning a reason (used in argument, explanation or intensification; because, seeing)”].
 4. Here again, we see that tongues are given as a sign or evidence of the Holy Spirit (see Mark 16:17; 1 Cor. 14:22).

- D. “Can anyone keep these people from being **baptized with water**? They have **received the Holy Spirit just as we have.**” (v.47)
1. God had now made it crystal clear that the *whole* gospel—repentance, salvation, water baptism, and baptism in the Holy Spirit—was for Jew and Gentile alike.
 2. These Gentiles had received the *same gift* of the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:17) in the *same way* that Peter and the other Jewish believers had.
- E. “So **he ordered** [“commanded” – NKJV] **that they be baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ.” (v.48)
1. Even though they had already been accepted by God and filled with His Holy Spirit, they still needed water baptism—the order in which the two experiences occur is not important.
 2. Water baptism is not an option—it is a commandment (see Mat. 28:18-20)—it is the first step of “obedience that comes from faith (Rom. 1:5).
 3. Baptism is “God’s way,” and when people reject it, they are rejecting “God’s purpose for themselves”:

Luke 7:29-30: ²⁹*All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus’ words, acknowledged that God’s way was right, because they had been baptized by John.* ³⁰*But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God’s purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.)*

Luke 20:1-8: ¹*One day as He was teaching the people in the temple courts and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to Him.* ²*“Tell us by what authority You are doing these things,” they said. “Who gave You this authority?”* ³*He replied, “I will also ask you a question. Tell me,* ⁴**John’s baptism—was it from heaven, or from men?**⁵*They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will ask, ‘Why didn’t you believe him?’* ⁶*But if we say, ‘From men,’ all the people will stone us, because they are persuaded that John was a prophet.”* ⁷*So they answered, “We don’t know where it was*

from.”⁸ Jesus said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

VII. PETER REPORTS TO THE CHURCH

Acts 11:1-18: *1* The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. *2* So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him *3* and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

4 Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened: *5* “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. *6* I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds of the air. *7* Then I heard a voice telling me, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.” *8* “I replied, ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ *9* “The voice spoke from heaven a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ *10* This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.

11 “Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. *12* The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man’s house. *13* He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. *14* He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.’

15 “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as He had come on us at the beginning. *16* Then I remembered what the Lord had said: “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ *17* So if God gave them the same gift as He gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?” *18* When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.”

A. “The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea **heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.**” (v.1)

1. This was no small news, and as expected, it created quite a stir amongst the Jewish believers.

2. After centuries, God was now letting non-Jewish “outsiders” enter “in!”
- B. “So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the **circumcised believers criticized him** and said, ‘You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.’” (vv.2-3)
1. Not only did Peter go into a Gentile house, but he had entertained Gentile guests in his own house (Acts 10:23)!
 2. We continue to see the difficulty with which the Jewish people—even Spirit-baptized believers—had in accepting God’s New Covenant, all-inclusive salvation by grace.
- C. “Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened.” (vv.4-13)
1. In defending his actions, Peter laid out a careful step-by-step account of his vision of the sheet, Cornelius’ visitation by an angel, the arrival of the messengers sent by Cornelius, the Holy Spirit’s command to accompany them, and the pouring out of the Spirit on all of those gathered to listen to Peter’s message of salvation.
 2. He did this to demonstrate how God had worked in so many definite and yet distinct ways.
- D. “He will bring you a message through which **you and all your household will be saved.**” (v.14)
1. As pointed out earlier, this is a clear indication that Cornelius (and others in his household), though God-fearing and righteous, *still* needed to hear the gospel and be saved.
 2. Paul summarizes this very nicely in **Rom. 10:12-15**:
¹²*For there is **no difference between Jew and Gentile**—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on Him, ¹³for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” ¹⁴How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And **how can they hear without someone preaching to them?** ¹⁵And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”*

- E. “As I began to speak, **the Holy Spirit came on them as He had come on us at the beginning.** Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’” (vv.15-16)
1. “As I began to speak” – in Acts 10, it appears that Peter had been speaking some time before the Holy Spirit fell on them; apparently, he was interrupted before he proceeded very far in his message.
 2. “As He had come on us at the beginning” – just like Pentecost, which Peter refers to as “the beginning;” the outpouring of the Holy Spirit *was* the **beginning** of the church.
 3. Peter realized that what happened at Pentecost was only a partial fulfillment of the Lord’s promise—it now included all Gentiles.
- F. “So if **God gave them the same gift as He gave us,** who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?” (v.17)
1. “The same gift” – Cornelius and the other Gentiles had received the exact same gift that Peter and the 120 had received on the day of Pentecost; it was the same power, the same anointing!
 2. Peter could not deny the Gentiles the invitation to be baptized and enjoy fellowship in Christ with all believers; the Jewish believers were now compelled to recognize that God was going to save Gentiles on equal terms with Jews.
 3. The door of grace was opened to the Gentiles, not by human decision, but by God’s supernatural act of pouring out His Spirit upon them.
- G. “When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, ‘So then, **God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.**’” (v.18)
1. Clearly, the Holy Spirit was at work—upon hearing Peter’s account and recognizing the hand of God in all that had taken place, the circumcised believers did a complete turnaround—they went from criticizing to praising!

2. God grants repentance – even repentance is a gift from God; without the gracious operation of God in the heart of a sinner, he is unable to turn from his sins:

2 Tim. 2:24-26: ²⁴And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. ²⁵Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, **in the hope that God will grant them repentance** leading them to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

3. "Repentance unto life" – only repentance leads to life—all other paths end in death.

VIII. THE CHURCH IN ANTIOCH

Acts 11:19-30: ¹⁹Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. ²⁰Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. ²¹The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

²²News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³When 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. ²⁴He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

²⁵Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. 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.

²⁷During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸One 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.) ²⁹The disciples, each according to his ability,

decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. ³⁰*This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.*

- A. “Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, **telling the message only to Jews.**” (v.19)
 - 1. Those scattered from Jerusalem by the persecution in Acts chapter 8 had spread further and further out from home.
 - 2. Although they were outwardly following the letter of the Lord’s command in Acts 1:8 to go to the ends of the earth with the gospel, they were still clinging to their belief that salvation was *only* for the Jews.
- B. “Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and **began to speak to Greeks** also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.” (vv.20-21)
 - 1. Other believers from Cyprus and Cyrene, however, began to preach the gospel to Greeks in Antioch.
 - 2. God blessed and confirmed their ministry with abundant fruit—many Gentiles were coming to faith in Christ.
 - 3. The introduction of Christianity to the city of Antioch was an important step in the advance of the church; Antioch was the third city of the Roman Empire (after Rome and Alexandria), and the first largely Gentile church was located there—a church that would serve as Paul’s base of operation from which his three missionary journeys would be launched.
- C. When news of the revival in Antioch reached the church at Jerusalem, 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.” (vv.22-24)
 - 1. He saw the evidence of the grace of God working in the believers’ lives.
 - 2. Here we see why the apostles had nicknamed him Barnabas or “Son of Encouragement” (Acts 4:36)—he

brought great encouragement to the church in Antioch and many more were added to the church there through his ministry.

- D. “Then **Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul**, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people.” (vv.25-26)
1. It was Barnabas who had first introduced Saul to the apostles in Jerusalem and convinced them that he (Saul) was a true disciple (Acts 9:26-27)
 2. Barnabas seemed to have a special kinship with Saul, and the two would minister and travel together until their disagreement and separation in Acts 15:36-40.
 3. Barnabas brought Saul to Antioch—out of obscurity into a more public station. This shows something very precious about Barnabas’ character. Saul, a more popular preacher, called the “chief speaker” in Acts 14:12, would very likely eclipse Barnabas’ ministry, outshining him; but this was of no concern to humble Barnabas—he was very willing to be eclipsed if it meant greater blessing and benefit for the church of God!
 4. NOTE: There is an interesting progression from Acts 11 through Acts 15 where the order in which the two names are mentioned is reversed: “*Barnabas and Saul*” (11:26,30; 12:25; 13:1-2,7) to “*Paul and Barnabas*” (13:42-43,46,50; 14:1,3,23; 15:2,22,35).
 5. Barnabas had no difficulty in esteeming Saul better than himself and wasn’t, like so many preachers today, threatened by others more gifted than himself. Human pride never likes to play second fiddle, as so graphically portrayed in the pathetic character of King Saul in the Old Testament:

1 Sam. 18:6-10: ⁶*When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with tambourines and lutes.* ⁷*As they danced, they sang: “**Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.**”* ⁸*Saul was very angry;*

this refrain galled him. “They have credited David with tens of thousands,” he thought, “but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?” ⁹And from that time on ***Saul kept a jealous eye on David.*** ¹⁰The next day ***an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul.***

6. God help us to rejoice when others have greater capacities, larger opportunities, and do more good than we can do!
 7. Barnabas and Saul remained in Antioch, teaching the church for a full year.
- E. “The **disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.**” (v.26)
1. Whether adopted by believers or, as is more likely, invented by enemies as a term of reproach, “Christian” is an apt title for one “belonging to Christ” or “a follower of Christ;” “Christ” literally means “anointed,” so true Christians are “anointed ones”—they have His same anointing (see 1 John 2:20, 27; 2 Cor. 1:21).
 2. The term “Christian” is found elsewhere in Scripture only in Acts 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16.
 3. NOTE: They were *first* disciples, *then* Christians!
- F. Agabus prophesied famine, and aid was sent to Judea (vv.27-30)
1. Although Antioch became the center of the Gentile church, they remained in close fellowship with Jerusalem and the Jewish church there, as evidenced by the fact that “**prophets** came down from Jerusalem to Antioch” (v.27).
 2. This is the first mention of prophets in the church, although prophecy was an important part of Joel’s prophecy concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:17-18). New Testament prophets preach, exhort, explain or, as with Agabus, foretell (see Acts 13:1; 15:32; 19:6; 21:9-10); Agabus would later foretell Paul’s imprisonment (Acts 21:10).
 3. Barnabas and Saul would deliver the aid to the *elders* in Judea—this is the first mention of “elders” in Acts.

IX. JAMES KILLED AND PETER IMPRISONED

Acts 12:1-5: ¹*It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them.* ²*He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword.* ³*When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.* ⁴*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.* ⁵*So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.*

A. King Herod puts James to death (vv.1-2)

1. Satan's relentless attacks on the church continued. This time the persecution came from Herod the king—Herod Agrippa I, a grandson of Herod the Great.
2. He was appointed king over Judea by the Roman Emperor, Claudius. An observer of the Law of Moses, he went to great lengths to please the Jews. It was in pursuance of this policy that he harassed some from the church and killed James the brother of John with the sword.
3. Historians place James' death about 10 years after Christ's death and resurrection.

B. The Jews responded so enthusiastically to the execution of James that Herod was encouraged to do the same with Peter (vv.3-4).

1. Herod would wait until Passover was finished to bring Peter out of prison for public trial.
2. Meanwhile, Peter was guarded by 16 soldiers in prison.

C. "The church was earnestly praying to God for him." (v.5)

1. By no coincidence, James and Peter, both servants of the same God would meet very different fates at the hand of King Herod—even though it was certainly Herod's intention to have both executed.
2. Here we are confronted with the mystery of God's will (Eph. 1:9) and the fact that we simply cannot comprehend His ways: James would be put to death and Peter would be

rescued. Why? There is no explanation except perhaps the following:

- a) **Ps. 135:6:** *The LORD does whatever pleases Him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths.*
 - b) **Isa. 55:8-9:** ⁸*“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD.* ⁹*“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.”*
 - c) **Rom. 11:33-34 (NKJV):** ³³*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!* ³⁴*“FOR WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD? OR WHO HAS BECOME HIS COUNSELOR?”*
3. Prayer itself is a mystery—God doesn’t always seem to “answer” our prayers the way we expected; nevertheless, after James’ execution, the church prayed earnestly for Peter.
 4. NOTE: There is no mention of the church praying for James when he was arrested; perhaps they had become a bit complacent or apathetic, but after his death, they prayed earnestly for Peter! Sometimes God allows trouble or tragedy to stir us up out of our slumber.

X. PETER’S MIRACULOUS RESCUE

Acts 12:6-19: 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.* ⁷*Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. “Quick, get up!” he said, and the chains fell off Peter’s wrists.*

⁸*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.* ⁹*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.* ¹⁰*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.

¹¹Then 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.”

¹²When 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. ¹³Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door. ¹⁴When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, “Peter is at the door!” ¹⁵“You’re out of your mind,” they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, “It must be his angel.”

¹⁶But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. ¹⁷Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. “Tell James and the brothers about this,” he said, and then he left for another place. ¹⁸In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. ¹⁹After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.

A. **“The night before** Herod was to bring him to trial, **Peter was sleeping.”** (v.6)

1. In the natural, this was likely Peter’s last night in the land of the living!
2. But behold his assurance of faith, his peace in the storm—like Christ in the storm (Mark 4:37-38), he was sleeping!
3. Perhaps Peter remembered the Lord’s promise that he would live to be an old man (John 21:18), and so he knew that Herod could not kill him prematurely.

B. An angel of the Lord miraculously rescued Peter from prison (vv.7-11)

1. At first, Peter thought he was seeing a vision (v.9).
2. Finally, he came to himself and realized an angel had really appeared and rescued him (v.11).

- C. “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.” (v.12)
1. Peter instinctively went to the home of the mother of John Mark, the author of the Gospel of Mark.
 2. This must have been an all-night prayer meeting, since Peter’s escape took place in the middle of the night.
- D. “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!’” (vv.13-14)
1. The girl was so excited she forgot to let Peter in!
 2. She wanted everyone in the house to know that God had answered their prayers.
- E. But they all thought she was crazy and dismissed her, explaining that it must have been Peter’s guardian angel that she saw (v.15).
1. This is a very familiar and oft-repeated scene in Christian circles: when their prayers were answered, they were so surprised that they couldn’t believe it!
 2. And before we are too quick to jump all over these believers for their unbelieving prayers, let’s admit we’ve done the same—God in His mercy answered our faithless prayers and we had so little faith that we couldn’t even believe it when God’s answer came!
- F. When they finally let Peter in, they realized God had miraculously delivered him (and answered their prayers!), and they were all astonished (v.16).
- G. After describing how the Lord had rescued him, Peter told them to **tell James and the brothers** what had happened (v.17)
1. The apostle James—the son of Zebedee and brother of the apostle John—had been executed by Herod (v.2).
 2. This was another James—the Lord’s brother (Mat. 13:55), an apostle and leader in the Jerusalem church (Gal. 1:19; 2:9; Acts 15:13; 21:18).
- H. Unable to account for Peter’s disappearance, the poor soldiers guarding him were all executed by Herod (vv.18-19).

XI. HEROD'S DEATH

Acts 12:19-25: *Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there a while. ²⁰He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. Having secured the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king's country for their food supply.*

²¹*On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. ²²They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." ²³Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.*

²⁴*But the word of God continued to increase and spread. ²⁵When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.*

- A. For some unknown reason, there was strife between Herod and the people of Tyre and Sidon, so the people asked for peace and requested a meeting with Herod (vv.19-20).
- B. Appearing in all of his royal finery, Herod gave a speech that so thrilled the people they shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." (v.22)
- C. Herod, however, made no attempt to refuse such divine honors or give any glory to God—the Lord struck him down, he was eaten of worms and died (v.23).

1. **Gal. 6:7:** *Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.*

2. The one who arrogantly *thought* he had all power failed to learn the lesson of history, particularly that of King Nebuchadnezzar:

Dan. 5:19-20: [Daniel]: ¹⁹*Because of the high position He gave him [Nebuchadnezzar], all the peoples and nations and men of every language dreaded and feared him. **Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled.***

²⁰*But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with*

pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory.

3. Herod killed one of the Lord's apostles, but was slain by the One who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell; those who do harm to God's prophets and anointed servants invite the fierce judgment of God:
 - a) **Luke 12:4-5:** ⁴*I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more.* ⁵*But I will show you whom you should fear: **Fear Him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell.** Yes, I tell you, fear Him.*
 - b) **Ps. 105:15:** *Do not touch My anointed ones; do My prophets no harm.*
 - c) **Heb. 10:30-31:** ³⁰*For we know Him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge His people."* ³¹***It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.***

D. **"But the word of God continued to increase and spread."**
(v.24)

1. This is Luke's third progress report in Acts (Acts 6:7; 9:31); three more follow (Acts 16:5; 19:20; 28:31).
2. This has now become a familiar refrain in the Book of Acts: revival, opposition, persecution, and then *more* growth—how this infuriates the devil!
3. Persecution has never put out the flames of revival—quite the contrary—it only stokes the fire and spreads it further!

E. **"When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark."** (v.25)

1. After delivering the gift from the Antioch church (see Acts 11:30), Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch.
2. They took with them John Mark, the nephew of Barnabas, who later wrote the Gospel bearing his name; he would accompany Barnabas and Saul on part of their first missionary journey, but would also lead to their disagreement and separation (Acts 15:37-40).

3. NOTE: It is impossible to know whether Barnabas and Saul were in Jerusalem at the time of the death of James, the imprisonment of Peter, or the death of Herod.

XII. CONCLUSION

- A. The Jewish believers were slow to understand or accept the sweeping changes that God was bringing in this new dispensation of grace called the New Covenant.
- B. After the day of Pentecost, the church was essentially a Jewish church that remained in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria for more than ten years, despite the Lord's command to go the "ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).
- C. Finally (and reluctantly!), Peter was convinced through a vision and by the Holy Spirit to go to the Gentiles in Caesarea with the gospel.
- D. The Holy Spirit fell and revival broke out, and soon the church in Antioch was established and would eventually become the hub of Gentile gospel outreach.
- E. Persecution broke out in Jerusalem again, resulting in the church's second named martyr, James the brother of John; Peter would also be arrested, but would be miraculously rescued by an angel.
- F. Many Bible commentators feel that chapter 12 marks a distinct break in the Book of Acts, some even calling chapters 13-28 volume 2 of Acts. The apostle Peter would only be mentioned one more time in connection with the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, and the apostle Paul would now come to the forefront of action. Antioch would be the headquarters of the Gentile church and center from which the gospel would continue to spread further outward.

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Part 8 – Paul’s 1st Missionary Journey & Jerusalem Council (chs. 13-15)

(No. 1119.8 – 4/19/17 - NLC)

I. BARNABAS AND SAUL SENT OFF

Acts 13:1-3: *¹In 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. ²While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ³So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.*

- A. The Antioch church (modern **Syria**) was and is a model for modern churches to study very carefully—there was a plurality and rich diversity of gifted leaders, and no one was the “chief pastor in charge”—it is quite apparent that the *Holy Spirit* was in charge of this church.
- B. How unlike this model is the typical Christian ministry today, where there is a president or senior pastor who operates more like the CEO of a corporation and in many cases is given almost unlimited governing power!
- C. What a terrible mistake is made in many of today’s churches where one man is expected to possess all the necessary gifts for leadership, preaching, counseling, etc. No wonder so many pastors quit the ministry or end up in complete burnout!
- D. “In the church at Antioch there were **prophets and teachers**: Barnabas, Simeon..., Lucius..., Manaen... and Saul.” (v.1)
 - 1. God had wonderfully blessed and enriched this church with various ministry gifts listed in Ephesians 4:11, and two of these men were about to become apostles.
 - 2. **Prophets** - As previously mentioned [see *Section VIII.F* of Part 7, p.124, the first prophets in the early church had

come from Jerusalem to Antioch, including the prophet Agabus (Acts 11:27-30);

- a) “Prophet” [Gk. *prophetes* = “a foreteller; literally to show, make known, speak or say before; by analogy, an inspired speaker;” see Acts 3:24 – “prophets... foretold”];
- b) Prophets (and prophetesses – both sexes are mentioned in the Scriptures) were specially gifted by the Holy Spirit to receive revelations directly from God and to preach them to others; in a real sense, the prophets were mouthpieces for the Lord, and could often foretell coming events.
- c) Prophets are second to the apostles in Paul’s lists (1 Cor. 12:28-29; Eph. 2:20; 4:11).

3. Teachers

- a) “Teacher” [Gk. *didaskalos* = “an instructor; doctor, master, teacher”];
 - b) This is the first and only direct reference to teachers in the book of Acts, although the Gk. verb “to teach” (*didasko*) is often mentioned in connection with the ministries of the apostles and others (see Acts 4:2,18; 5:21,25,28,42; 11:26; 15:35; 18:11,25; 20:20; 28:31).
 - c) Teachers were men to whom the Holy Spirit had given the ability to expound and explain the Word of God to others in a simple and understandable manner.
 - d) Teachers are third in Paul’s list in 1 Cor. 12:28-29, but last in Eph. 4:11.
4. The names of these ministers are given, indicating that their graces were quite evident and manifest to the entire church body; Barnabas is listed first, perhaps because he was the eldest and Saul last, probably because he was the youngest, but the last would soon become the first!
- E. “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.’” (v.2)
1. “Worshiping the Lord and fasting” – perhaps this was a regular practice in the Antioch church (and should be in our present-day churches as well!).

2. Paul’s first apostolic mission didn’t result from a board meeting or planning session—it was initiated by the Holy Spirit as the ministers fasted, prayed and worshiped. This is huge!
 3. “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul” – the Holy Spirit singled out these two men for a definite purpose.
 4. We are not told how the Holy Spirit conveyed this message, but it is likely that He spoke through one of the prophets who were there.
- F. “So after they had fasted and prayed, **they placed their hands on them** and sent them off.” (v.3)
1. NLT: “So after *more* fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way.”
 2. Fasting in Acts: Acts 10:30; 14:23;
 3. Barnabas and Saul had already been in the work of the Lord for about eight years before this time—they were not novices in the service of Christ. They were commissioned and released for their new service, being sent away with the church’s blessing and goodwill.
 4. The laying on of hands in this instance imparted to Barnabas and Saul no spiritual gift or authority that they did not already possess; the church of Antioch, through its leaders, was simply expressing its fellowship with them and recognizing them as its delegates or “apostles” (Acts 14:4).
 5. They were sent out by the whole church, and it was to the whole church that they made their report when they returned to Antioch (Acts 14:26-27).

II. BARNABAS AND SAUL ON CYPRUS

Acts 13:4-12: ⁴*The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.*

⁵*When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.*

⁶*They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-*

Jesus, ⁷who 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. ⁸But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith.

⁹Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, ¹⁰“You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? ¹¹Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun.” Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. ¹²When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

- A. “The two of them, **sent on their way by the Holy Spirit**, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.” (v.4)
1. “**Two of them**” – it was customary to go “two by two”:
 - a) **Mark 6:7**: *Calling the Twelve to Him, He sent them out **two by two** and gave them authority over evil spirits.*
 - b) **Luke 10:1**: *After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them **two by two** ahead of Him to every town and place where He was about to go.*
 - c) Examples:
 - (1) Peter & John (Acts 3:1; 4:3; 8:14-17)
 - (2) Barnabas & Saul (Acts 11-15)
 - (3) Judas & Silas (Acts 15:22)
 - (4) Paul & Silas (Acts 15:40; 16:25)
 2. The Holy Spirit *called* them, *set them apart*, and *sent* them.
 3. This marks the beginning of Paul’s First Missionary Journey and extends to Acts 14:28; the mission would focus mainly on evangelizing Asia Minor.
 4. Their first stop, Cyprus, was Barnabas’ birthplace (Acts 4:26);

- B. “When they arrived at **Salamis**, they **proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues**. John was with them as their helper.” (v.5)
1. We have already mentioned earlier in this how it was the apostles’ practice whenever they visited a new city to always go to the synagogue first in order to proclaim the gospel to the Jews there study [see *Section II.I.4* of Part 4, p.44].
 2. John Mark, a cousin of Barnabas (Acts 12:12,25; Col. 4:10), went with them as a “helper” [Gk. *huperetes* = “literally an under oarsman, that is, a subordinate, assistant, sexton”], and would quickly desert them and return to his home in Jerusalem (v.13).
- C. The **false prophet Elymas (Bar-Jesus)** and his opposition to the gospel at Paphos (vv.6-12)
1. Elymas was a Jewish wizard or sorcerer and false prophet, an attendant to the Roman proconsul, Sergius Paulus;
 2. Note the parallels with Philip and Peter’s ministry in Samaria and their encounter with Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:9-24)—Satan always tries to resist the introduction of the gospel into new regions.
 3. “The proconsul, **an intelligent man**, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he **wanted to hear the word of God.**” (v.7)
 - a) AMP: “He was closely associated with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, who was an intelligent and sensible man of sound understanding; he summoned to him Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the Word of God [concerning salvation in the kingdom of God attained through Christ].”
 - b) Intelligent and sensible people want to listen to God’s word, *NOT* close their ears to it!
 4. “But **Elymas** the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) **opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith.**” (v.8)
 - a) What horrifying judgment awaits those false teachers, prophets and professors who not only destroy themselves, but insist on corrupting as many others as

possible; there is a great deal in Scripture about such people.

- b) Note how the devil is especially busy with governing authorities and men of great influence and power—to keep them from becoming true followers of Christ—because he knows that their example, whether good or bad, can have a profound effect upon many; and those who are in any way instrumental in trying to turn people against the truths and ways of Christ are without doubt doing the devil’s work.
- c) Years after his experience in Paphos, Paul would write to Timothy about those like Elymas who oppose the truth:

2 Tim. 3:8-9: ⁸*Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men **oppose the truth**—men of **depraved minds**, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. ⁹But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.*

- 5. “Then **Saul**, who was also called **Paul**...” (v.9)
 - a) “Saul” [means “asked of God”] was his given Hebrew, Jewish name; “Paul” [means “little”] would be his Roman, Hellenistic name;
 - b) Henceforth he would always be called Paul in the book of Acts.
- 6. “Then **Paul filled with the Holy Spirit**, looked straight at Elymas and said, ‘You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now **the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind**, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun.’ Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand.” (vv.9-11)
 - a) Whew! Lest anyone be tempted to criticize Paul or accuse him of being too harsh or in the flesh, it is explicitly stated that he was “filled with the Holy Spirit.”

- b) Realizing that the proconsul was a sincere seeker of truth and Elymas a satanically-inspired enemy of truth, Paul announced God's four-fold indictment against the false prophet:
- (1) You are a child of the devil (though called Bar-Jesus, lit. "son of Jesus");
 - (2) You are an enemy of everything that is right;
 - (3) You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery (showing he was indeed like his father, the devil – Gen. 3:1; John 8:44);
 - (4) You will never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord (he was misrepresenting the ways of the Lord to discourage people from embracing them);
- c) The **“hand of the Lord”** [see Acts 11:21 – often represents the presence of God's power to assist, bless, and work signs and wonders] came against Elymas (Paul didn't have to lift a hand!), bringing temporary blindness upon him;
- (1) As Paul had once been blinded (Acts 9:8-9)!
 - (2) This was a fitting punishment, as Elymas had tried to keep sincere souls like Sergius Paulus in spiritual darkness and blindness (2 Cor. 4:3-4); far worse is reserved for Elymas and his kind if they cannot find repentance (Jude 13).
 - (3) Elymas' blindness would be “for a time,” perhaps an allusion to the temporary blindness that has come upon Israel (Romans ch. 11), not only unwilling to accept their Messiah Jesus, but seeking to prevent others from doing so as well. As a result, Israel has been judicially blinded by God, but only for a time. Eventually a repentant remnant of the nation will turn to Jesus as Messiah and be converted.
- d) “He [Elymas] groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand.”
- (1) He can no longer pretend to be a guide to the proconsul or anyone else!

- (2) Where are all of his magical powers of sorcery now—he can neither find his own way or even a friend to help lead him?
7. “When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.” (v.12)
- a) The proconsul was astonished by the display of God’s power;
 - b) He believed—he became a Christian, the firstfruits of Paul’s ministry in Paphos, and possibly his first trophy of grace on this, his first missionary journey.
 - c) The apostles were given great power and authority even in dispensing divine punishment, as seen here and in Acts 5 with the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira (see also 1 Cor. 4:18-5:5; 2 Cor. 10:8; 13:2,10; 1 Tim. 1:20).

III. PAUL AND BARNABAS AT PISIDIAN ANTIOCH

Acts 13:13-52: ¹³From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.

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

¹⁶Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: “Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! ¹⁷The God of the people of Israel chose our fathers; He made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt, with mighty power He led them out of that country, ¹⁸He endured their conduct for about forty years in the desert, ¹⁹He overthrew seven nations in Canaan and gave their land to His people as their inheritance. ²⁰All this took about 450 years.

“After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. ²¹Then the people asked for a king, and He gave them Saul son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled forty years. ²²After removing Saul, He made David their king. He testified concerning him: ‘I have found David son of Jesse a man after My own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.’

²³“From this man’s descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as He promised. ²⁴Before the coming of Jesus, John

preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel. ²⁵As John was completing his work, he said: ‘Who do you think I am? I am not that One. No, but He is coming after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.’

²⁶“Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. ²⁷The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning Him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. ²⁸Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have Him executed. ²⁹When they had carried out all that was written about Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb. ³⁰But God raised Him from the dead, ³¹and for many days He was seen by those who had traveled with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now His witnesses to our people.

³²“We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers ³³He has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father.’ ³⁴The fact that God raised Him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words: ‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.’ ³⁵So it is stated elsewhere: ‘You will not let your Holy One see decay.’

³⁶“For when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed. ³⁷But the One whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.

³⁸“Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. ³⁹Through Him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. ⁴⁰Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you: ⁴¹‘Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you.’”

⁴²As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. ⁴³When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

⁴⁴On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.

⁴⁶Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’” ⁴⁸When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

⁴⁹The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. ⁵⁰But 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. ⁵¹So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. ⁵²And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

A. John Mark returned to Jerusalem (v.13)

1. John’s departure would become a major issue of contention between Paul and Barnabas later on (Acts 15:36-39), where Luke uses stronger language to describe John’s action (v.38): “Paul did not think it wise to take him [John Mark], because he had **deserted them** in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work.”
2. We are not told why John left them, but we will examine this further in Acts 15 when we study the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas concerning the matter.

B. Paul’s message in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch (vv.14-41)

1. Once again, the apostles take the message of salvation *first* to the Jews [see *Section II.B* on p.137].
2. “After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them [Paul and Barnabas], saying, ‘Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak.’” (v.15)
3. Paul was always ready “in season and out” to preach the gospel, and this was not an opportunity to be passed up!

4. In his message, Paul first traced their Jewish history from Egypt, through the judges, and then on to their first two kings, Saul and David (vv.17-22);
 5. He then explained how God brought the Savior Jesus from David's descendants, and he presented the good news of Christ to them, emphasizing His death, burial and resurrection (vv.23-37); [Note the similarities with Peter's sermons recorded earlier in the book of Acts].
 6. Paul's final appeal to his audience (vv.38-41):
 - a) There is **forgiveness** of sins through Jesus (v.38);
 - b) There is **justification** for everyone who believes, a justification that could not be obtained through the Law of Moses (v.39); Paul would later expound in much greater depth on the doctrine of justification in his epistle to the Romans;
 - c) A **stern warning** not to fulfill the words of the prophet Habakkuk (Hab. 1:5) by scoffing and rejecting the good news through unbelief (vv.40-41);
- C. Mixed response to the apostles' ministry in Pisidian Antioch (vv.42-52)
1. Many Jews and converts to Judaism embraced the apostles' message, inviting them to return the following Sabbath (vv.42-43)
 2. "On the next Sabbath almost **the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord**. When the **Jews** saw the crowds, they **were filled with jealousy** and talked abusively against what Paul was saying." (vv.44-45)
 - a) What an impact Paul's message had!
 - b) But once again we return to the familiar refrain: God moves, hearts are touched, and opposition forms—all because of JEALOUSY!
 - c) Certain Jews in leadership would have felt threatened when they saw the crowds leaving them and flocking toward the apostles, which led them to vehemently oppose them:

- d) NKJV: “But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and **contradicting** and **blaspheming**, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.
3. “Then Paul and Barnabas **answered them boldly**: ‘We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and **do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life**, we now turn to the Gentiles.’” (v.46)
- a) Note yet again the *boldness* of God’s apostles—they were not well-versed in soft-speak or political correctness!
- b) The apostles’ indictment against those who were rejecting the good news of Christ: “You judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life” (NAS)—God offered them salvation, but they had disqualified themselves!
- c) “Consider” (judge) yourselves [Gk. *krino* = “to decide (mentally or judicially); by implication to try, condemn, damn, decree, determine, esteem, judge, ordain, sentence”]; these Jews had literally decreed, ordained and damned themselves unworthy or unsuitable of eternal life!
- d) AMP: “And Paul and Barnabas spoke out plainly and boldly, saying, ‘It was necessary that God’s message [concerning salvation through Christ] should be spoken to you first. But since you thrust it from you, **you pass this judgment on yourselves that you are unworthy of eternal life** and out of your own mouth you will be judged. [Now] behold, we turn to the Gentiles (the heathen).’”
4. Because of the Jews’ rejection, the apostles announced that they would now turn to the Gentiles with the message of salvation, citing Isaiah 49:6 as their mandate (vv.46-47):
- a) “**We now turn to the Gentiles**. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’ When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord.”
- b) Interestingly, in Isaiah 49:6 God is speaking to the Messiah when He says, “I have set You as a light to the

Gentiles, that You should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.” But the Spirit of God permits the servants of the Messiah to apply these words to themselves, since they were His instruments in bringing light and salvation to the Gentile nations.

- c) The apostles’ announcement no doubt infuriated the Jews, but it brought great joy to the Gentiles.
5. “The **word of the Lord spread through the whole region**. But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred 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. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.” (vv.49-52)
- a) In spite of the Jews opposition, the word of God continued to spread throughout the land.
 - b) Paul and Barnabas were forcibly evicted from the area, and in accordance with the Christ’s instructions, they **shook off the dust from their feet**:
Luke 9:5: If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave their town, as a testimony against them.
Luke 10:10-12: ¹⁰But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, ¹¹“Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.” ¹²I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.
 - c) The original idea behind this gesture was that the community against which it was directed was doomed (possibly self-doomed) to destruction—a destruction so thorough that it extended to its very dust, which must therefore be removed. It was a sign of repudiation for their rejection of God’s word and a severance of responsibility on the part of the apostles.
 - d) The apostles’ shaking off the dust from their feet did not in this instance imply a complete break in their

relations with Pisidian Antioch, for they had left a body of believers there whom they would be visiting again some months later on their return to Antioch (Acts 14:21).

- e) Rather than leaving in defeat and dejection, all were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit (v.52).

D. Special notes on v.48: “When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and **all who were appointed for eternal life believed.**”

1. AMP: “As many as were **destined** (appointed and ordained) to eternal life believed.”
2. NLT: “All who were **chosen** for eternal life became believers.”
3. KJV: “As many as were **ordained** to eternal life believed.”
4. The phrase, “all who were appointed to eternal life believed” has been the subject of much controversy.
5. The debate centers on the words “appointed” and “believed,” and more specifically, the order—which comes first, the *appointing* or the *believing*?
6. “**Appointed**” [Gk. *tasso* = “to arrange in an orderly manner, that is, assign or dispose (to a certain position or lot); to appoint, determine, ordain, set”]; the essence of the word’s meaning is to place something in a certain rank or order and is derived from arranging or disposing a body of soldiers in regular military order.
7. The word *tasso* is used only eight times in the New Testament:
 - a) **Mat. 28:16 (NKJV):** “To the mountain which Jesus had **appointed** for them”;
 - b) **Luke 7:8 (KJV):** “For I also am a man **set** under authority”; appointed, or designated as a soldier, to be under the authority of another;
 - c) **Acts 15:2 (NIV):** “So Paul and Barnabas were **appointed** [by the church], along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem”;

- d) **Acts 22:10 (NKJV):** “You [Paul] will be told all things which are **appointed** [by the Lord Jesus] for you to do”
 - e) **Acts 28:23 (NKJV):** “So when they [the Romans] had **appointed** him [Paul] a day”
 - f) **Rom. 13:1 (KJV):** “The powers that be [civil authorities] are **ordained** of God”;
 - g) **1 Cor. 16:15 (NIV):** “They have devoted themselves to the service of the saints.”
8. In the Scripture references listed above, the word is used to denote the following:
- a) To command or designate (Mat. 28:16; Acts 22:10; 28:23);
 - b) To institute, constitute, ordain or appoint (Rom. 13:1)
 - c) To determine, appoint or resolve (Acts 15:2);
 - d) To place or subject under the authority of another (Luke 7:8);
 - e) To devote to (1 Cor. 16:15);
9. Some have suggested that the real meaning of the expression “**all who were appointed for eternal life believed**” simply states that they had the *internal disposition* or inclination within themselves to believe and receive eternal life. But the word *tasso* is never used to denote an internal disposition or inclination arising from one’s own self. The word uniformly conveys the idea of an ordering, disposing, or arranging from *without*; that is, from an outside source or authority, not the individual himself;
10. Being appointed for eternal life does not properly refer to an eternal decree, or directly to the doctrine of election, though some infer that; it simply refers to their being *disposed* to embrace eternal life. **They were then inclined by an influence outside of themselves that disposed them to embrace eternal life.** That this was done by the influence of the **Holy Spirit** and the

operation of **God's grace** is clear from many parts of the New Testament.

11. Salvation is often likened to a **new birth**. Children have **NOTHING** to do with their birth—they are the product of their parents' decision and actions. Note the emphasis in all of the following Scriptures on **God the Father** being the One who **gave us birth**:

- a) **Tit. 3:3-5:** ³*At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.* ⁴*But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared,* ⁵**He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.**
- b) **John 1:12-13:** ¹²*Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God—* ¹³**children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but BORN OF GOD.**
- c) **John 3:2-8:** ²*He [Nicodemus] came to Jesus at night and said, "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."* ³*In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is **born again** ["born from above"]."*
⁴*"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"* ⁵*Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. **Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.*** ⁶*You should not be surprised at My saying, 'You must be **born again** ["born from above"].'* ⁷***The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.***

- d) **1 Pet. 1:3:** *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy **He has given us new birth** [“He has **caused us** to be born again” – NAS] into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...*
- e) **James 1:17-18:** ¹⁷*Every good and perfect **gift** is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. ¹⁸**He chose to give us birth** [“In the exercise of His will He brought us forth” – NAS; “Of His own will begat He us” – KJV] through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all He created.*
- f) John the Baptist told the Jewish Pharisees and Sadducees that God can even raise up children from stones:
- Mat. 3:9:** *And do not think you can say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as our father.” I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.*
- g) **John 6:37, 44, 63-65:** ³⁷***All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never drive away... ⁴⁴No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day... ⁶³The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. ⁶⁴Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus had KNOWN FROM THE BEGINNING which of them did not believe and who would betray Him. ⁶⁵He went on to say, “This is why I told you that **no one can come to Me unless the Father has enabled him.**”***

12. Another metaphor used in Scripture to help us understand the miraculous nature of salvation is that of the sinner being raised from the dead:

Eph. 2:4-9: ⁴*But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵**made us alive with Christ even when we were dead** in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved... ⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, **through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast.***

13. As noted in Part 7 of this study [see *Section VII.G* on p.120], even **repentance**, man's first response to God's invitation to salvation, **must be granted by God Himself**; it is God who opens the heart, enabling the sinner to turn to Him:
- a) **Acts 11:18**: *When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, **God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.**"*
 - b) **2 Tim. 2:24-26**: ²⁴*And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. ²⁵Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, **in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth,** ²⁶and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.*
 - c) **Acts 16:13-15**: [In Philippi] ¹³*On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. **The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.** ¹⁵When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.*
14. Being appointed to eternal life does seem to *imply* **sovereign election**: God *disposed* them to embrace eternal life. Many view this verse as a simple statement on the sovereign election of God, emphasizing that it should be taken at its face value and believed. The Bible definitely teaches that God chose some before the foundation of the world to be in Christ, and He gave them to Christ and enabled them to come to Christ. That God does this according to a plan in His own mind—a plan which is unchangeable as He Himself is unchangeable—is clear from numerous Scriptures:
- a) **Rom. 11:5-6 (NKJV)**: ⁵*Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the **election of***

grace. ⁶And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.

- b) **2 Tim. 1:8-9:** ⁸ ... God, ⁹ who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.
- c) **Eph. 1:4-13:** ⁴For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love ⁵He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will—⁶to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves... ¹¹In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will, ¹²in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of His glory. ¹³And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.
- d) **John 17:6,9:** ⁶I have revealed You to those whom You gave Me out of the world. They were Yours; You gave them to Me and they have obeyed Your word... ⁹I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those You have given Me, for they are Yours.
- e) **Rom. 8:28-30:** ²⁸And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. ²⁹For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified.

15. Jesus and the apostles make frequent references to God's "elect" or "chosen" in the New Testament; in every case, it

is God who is doing the choosing or electing. Regardless of our difficulty in understanding the concept of divine election, we simply cannot ignore or dismiss these Scriptures as irrelevant:

- a) “**Elect**” or “chosen” [Gk. *eklektos* = “From *eklegomai* = “to select, choose (by implication favorite); chosen, elect”]
- b) **Mark 13:20, 22, 27:** ²⁰*If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the **elect**, whom He has **chosen**, He has shortened them...* ²²*For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the **elect**—if that were possible...* ²⁷*And He will send His angels and gather His **elect** from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.*
- c) **Mat. 22:14:** *For many are invited [“called”], but few are **chosen**.*
- d) **Luke 18:7:** *And will not God bring about justice for His **chosen ones** [“elect” – KJV], who cry out to Him day and night? Will He keep putting them off?*
- e) **John 15:16:** *You did not **choose Me**, but I **chose** you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in My name.*
- f) **Rom. 8:33:** *Who will bring any charge against those whom God has **chosen** [“God’s elect” – KJV]? It is God who justifies.*
- g) **Col. 3:12 (NKJV):** *Therefore, as the **elect** of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;*
- h) **2 Tim. 2:10:** *Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the **elect**, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.*
- i) **Tit. 1:1:** *Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God’s **elect** and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness...*
- j) **1 Pet. 1:1-2 (NKJV):** ¹*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ²**elect according to***

the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

- k) **Rev. 17:14:** *They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because He is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with Him will be His called, **chosen** and faithful followers.*
16. However, the Bible teaches with equal emphasis that **man is a free moral agent** and that if he will receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, he will be saved. Every man, woman and child must give an account before God, and **all will be judged according to what they have done** (Rev. 20:12-13), not according to their election! God would be unjust if *He* were to blame for someone not believing in Christ and ending up in eternal damnation.
17. **Divine election and human responsibility are both scriptural truths, and neither should be emphasized at the expense of the other.** While there seems to be a conflict between the two, this conflict exists only in the human mind, and not in the mind of God.
18. Men are damned by their own choice and not by any act of God; those who go to hell disqualified themselves, or as the apostles stated in v.46, they have “judged themselves unworthy of eternal life.”
19. It is no coincidence both divine election and human responsibility are juxtaposed in the same passage of Scripture, and the two points in question are (1) eternal life (2) people’s response to the word of God (vv.46-48):
- a) The **Jews** had judged, decreed, ordained and damned THEMSELVES unworthy of eternal life by rejecting the word of God: this clearly emphasizes human responsibility in salvation [see *Section III.C.3* on p.144]: they rejected the word of God, they disqualified themselves—they brought this on themselves, and no outside influence is implicated;
 - b) The **Gentiles** honored the word of God and believed because God had decreed/appointed these unworthy

Gentiles to inherit eternal life: they responded positively to the word of God and believed.

20. If all mankind received its just due, then all would be lost. But God in grace stoops down and saves some. Does He have a right to do this? Of course He does. The doctrine of the sovereign election of God is a teaching that gives God His proper place as the Ruler of the universe who can do as He chooses and who will never choose to do anything unrighteous or unkind. Many of our difficulties with this subject would be solved if we would remember the following: “The sovereignty of God is absolute; yet it is never exercised in condemning men who ought to be saved, but rather has resulted in the salvation of men who deserved to be lost.” Paul expounds on this in a very difficult and challenging passage of Scripture:

Rom. 9:9-24: ⁹For this was how the promise was stated: “At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son.” ¹⁰Not only that, but Rebekah’s children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. ¹¹Yet, **before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God’s purpose in election might stand:** ¹²not by works but by Him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” ¹³Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

¹⁴What then shall we say? **Is God unjust? Not at all!** ¹⁵For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” ¹⁶It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy. ¹⁷For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display My power in you and that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” ¹⁸Therefore God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens whom He wants to harden. ¹⁹One of you will say to me: “Then why does God still blame us? For who resists His will?”

²⁰But **who are you, O man, to talk back to God?** “Shall what is formed say to Him who formed it, ‘Why did You make me like this?’” ²¹Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? ²²What if God,

*choosing to show His wrath and make His power known, bore with great patience the objects of His wrath— prepared for destruction? ²³What if He did this to make the riches of His glory known to the **objects of His mercy, whom He prepared in advance for glory— ²⁴even us, whom He also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?***

21. God has made it very clear in His word that **it is never His will for anyone to perish** in eternal damnation and it is His will that *all* come to repentance:
- a) **John 3:16:** *For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that **WHOEVER believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.***
 - b) **2 Pet. 3:9 (NKJV):** *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, **not willing that ANY should perish but that ALL should come to repentance.***
 - c) **1 Tim. 2:3-4 (KJV):** *³For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; ⁴who will have **ALL MEN to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.***

IV. PAUL AND BARNABAS AT ICONIUM

Acts 14:1-7: ¹At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. ²But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. ³So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of His grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.

⁴The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. ⁵There was a plot afoot among the Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. ⁶But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, ⁷where they continued to preach the good news.

- A. “At **Iconium** Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.” (v.1)

1. As noted repeatedly [see *Section II.I.4* of Part 4, p.44, *Section II.B* on p.137 & *Section III.B.1* on p.142 of Part 8], the apostles once again followed their usual practice of going *first* to the Jews at their synagogue to deliver the good news of Jesus Christ.
 2. They spoke so effectively [“with such power” – AMP] that a great number [“multitude” – KJV] of Jews and Gentiles believed.
 - a) Interestingly, this comes right on the heels (no pun intended!) of the apostles shaking the dust off of their feet at Pisidian Antioch;
 - b) But here at Iconium, large numbers embrace the preaching of Paul and Barnabas.
- B. “But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.” (v.2)
1. “Refused to believe” [Gk. *apeitheo* = “to disbelieve (willfully and perversely); disobedient”] – they were willfully refusing to believe.
 2. Throughout the Book of Acts, it was the unbelieving Jews who were most often the instigators of opposition against the apostles, though they themselves were not always the persecutors—they were masters at stirring up the Gentiles to carry out their wicked schemes.
- C. “So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the **Lord, who confirmed the message of His grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.**” (v.3)
1. Despite the opposition and obvious trouble that was brewing, the apostles remained in Iconium for a long time, preaching boldly in the Lord.
 2. They preached the message [“word” – KJV] of His grace [see Acts 20:24, 32].
 3. God confirmed the apostles’ ministry with miraculous signs and wonders:
 - a) NLT: “The Lord proved their message was true by giving them power to do miraculous signs and wonders.”
 - b) See Acts 2:22; Heb. 2:3-4; 2 Cor. 12:12.

- D. When the apostles (**Paul and Barnabas** are both called apostles in vv.4 & 14) learned of a plot amongst some Jews and Gentiles to assault and stone them, they **fled to Lystra and Derbe**, cities of Lycaonia. (vv.4-6)
1. On this particular occasion, the apostles *fled* from impending danger; in many other instances, the early Christians took their stand (even unto death, as with Stephen) and seemed to remain in a place in spite of persecution and danger.
 2. Why did they escape at times and stand their ground at others? There is no clear explanation.
 3. Jesus taught His disciples to be “wise as serpents and harmless as doves,” and “when they persecute you in this city, flee to another;” but He also told them “not to fear those who kill the body” (Mat. 10:16-28).
 4. In other words, there is no set code of conduct or blanket rules concerning these matters. The overarching principle throughout the Book of Acts is the fact that the Christians were led, guided and controlled by the Holy Spirit.
- E. “Where they continued to preach the good news.” (v.7)
1. Even when persecution scattered the Christians, they “preached the word wherever they went” (Acts 8:4).
 2. Paul and Barnabas did not lay low, hide out or sit still—they kept right on preaching the gospel!
 3. Whenever one door closed, they moved on to the next open door and continued taking the message of God’s grace.

V. PAUL AND BARNABAS AT LYSTRA AND DERBE

Acts 14:8-20: ⁸*In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked.* ⁹*He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed* ¹⁰*and called out, “Stand up on your feet!” At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.*

¹¹*When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in human form!”* ¹²*Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker.* ¹³*The priest of Zeus, whose*

temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.

¹⁴But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: ¹⁵“Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. ¹⁶In the past, He let all nations go their own way. ¹⁷Yet He has not left Himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; He provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.” ¹⁸Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

¹⁹Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. ²⁰But 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.

A. In Lystra, a **man crippled from birth is miraculously healed.** (vv.8-10)

1. Paul “saw that he had faith to be healed” (v.9)—obviously a supernatural discernment given to Paul by the Holy Spirit, possibly through a word of knowledge or the discerning of spirits [see 1 Cor. 12:7-11].
2. Paul called out [“said with a loud voice” – KJV], “Stand up on your feet!” At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

B. “When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, ‘The **gods have come down to us in human form!**’” (v.11)

1. Since the miracle had been performed openly, and since Paul had attracted considerable attention by speaking in a loud voice, the crowd was greatly impressed.
2. These Lycaonians were so given to idol worship that they believed their “gods” had now visited them in the human form of Paul and Barnabas!

- C. The crowd thought Barnabas was the god Zeus, and Paul was the god Hermes; they were actually making preparations to offer sacrifices to them. (vv.12-13)
1. Zeus, the Greek mythological god believed to be the father of all the other gods and men, was the patron god of Lystra and his temple was there; it is apparent from the text that they had a priest and the people offered animal sacrifices to him.
 2. Hermes was believed to be the messenger of the gods, and they assumed Paul was Hermes “because he was the chief speaker.”
 3. When God uses one of His servants, particularly in working miraculous signs and wonders (as with Paul in the healing of the cripple here), there is a subtle danger far more pernicious than all the other forms of persecution or opposition—it is worship! Not the worship of God, but the tendency for people to idolize and exalt the human instrument beyond proper measure. They begin to focus their attention, not on Christ, but on His servant.
 4. The Scriptures explain that one of our greatest tests is not suffering, but praise:
 - a) **Prov. 27:21:** *The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but man is tested by the praise he receives.*
 - b) We saw earlier in **Acts 12:21-23** how Herod failed such a test and it resulted in his untimely death [see *Section XI.C* of Part 7 on p.129]:

*²¹On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. ²²They shouted, “**This is the voice of a god, not of a man.**” ²³Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.*
 5. The apostles were always very careful to turn any such glory or praise immediately and directly back to God:
 - a) **Acts 3:11-12** – [Peter, after the healing of the crippled beggar at the temple]: “**Why do you stare at us** as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?” [see *Section II.B* of Part 4 on p.41];

- b) **Acts 10:25-26** – [Peter, when Cornelius fell at his feet in reverence]: “Stand up... **I am only a man** myself.” [see *Section IV.B* of Part 7 on p.112].

D. And when the Lycaonians were about to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas, they vehemently urged the crowd to stop and turn to the living God. (vv.14-17)

1. “But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they **tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting**: ‘Men, why are you doing this? **We too are only men**, human like you.’” (vv.14-15)
2. “We are bringing you good news, telling you to **turn from these worthless things to the living God**, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them.” (v.15)
 - a) Putting men on a pedestal is folly—the apostles warned them that such activities are worthless and vain.
 - b) They were bringing the good news of a living God, the Creator of the universe.
3. It is significant to point out that Paul and Barnabas, when addressing these Gentiles, did not directly quote the Old Testament Scriptures (sometimes referred to as *special revelation*) as they did when speaking to Jews; they merely pointed to creation and the evidence of the existence of God in creation (known as *general revelation*). Then they reminded them of the goodness of God expressed through His loving providence of rain, fruitful seasons, and food for them to eat and enjoy.
4. “In the past, He let all nations go their own way.” (v.16)
 - a) This statement is similar to one Paul would later make to the idol-worshipping Greeks in Athens in Acts 17:30 that “in the past God overlooked such ignorance” (making images of the divine being out of gold, silver or stone) before the full revelation of His will.
 - b) Paul would later write to the Roman Christians that God has given a clear revelation of Himself to all nations through His creation, leaving men without any excuse:

Rom. 1:19-20: ¹⁹Since *what may be known about God is plain to them*, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, **being understood from what has been made**, so that men are without excuse.

5. “Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.” (v.18)
 - a) The Lycaonians were convinced that Paul and Barnabas were “gods come down in human form” and were bent on worshiping them with their sacrifices.
 - b) With great difficulty the apostles finally prevailed in convincing the crowd to stop their folly.
- E. “Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They **stoned Paul** and dragged him outside the city, **thinking he was dead**. (v.19)
 1. The same troublemakers from Pisidian Antioch (not Antioch in Syria) and Iconium (Acts 13:50-51; 14:2-6) caught up with Paul and Barnabas in Lystra.
 2. The very crowd that had previously wanted to honor the apostles as gods now wanted to stone them—how fickle is the heart of fallen man! One minute the crowds are laying down palm branches exclaiming, “Hosanna! Blessed is the King of Israel!” and a short while later they are screaming, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”
 3. It is quite possible that the people of Lystra were offended by the apostles’ refusal to accept their divine honors, sacrifices and worship; this would have made the Lystrans look foolish and so their “love” quickly turned to hatred!
 4. They stoned Paul, thinking he was dead (v.20)
 - a) This was a severe beating which left Paul unconscious;
 - b) This is undoubtedly the event Paul includes in his list of sufferings and hardships where he says “once I was stoned” (2 Cor. 11:25), and it had likely produced some of the “marks” Paul bore in his body for the sake of Christ (Gal. 6:17).

F. “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. (v.20)

1. The disciples gathered around Paul, presumably to offer earnest prayer for his healing and restoration;
2. Their prayer was quickly answered, as an obvious miracle had taken place in Paul’s complete recovery—he “got up” [Gk. *anistemi* = “to stand up, raise up (again), rise (again)”]—suggesting he had been raised back to life!
3. It is quite possible that one of the disciples present that day was young Timothy, who lived in Lystra (Acts 16:1):

2 Tim. 3:10-11: *¹⁰You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, ¹¹persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured.*

4. Paul went back into the city!
 - a) With no concern for his own safety, Paul was able to walk right back into the city where he had been stoned!
 - b) This was so that his persecutors might see the mighty power of God manifested in his restoration, and the faith of the young converts would be strengthened.
 - c) As discussed previously [see *Section IV.D* on p.157], on certain occasions, the apostles would flee from persecution and danger, but on others they would walk right back into danger! They were always ready and willing to make the ultimate sacrifice of losing their lives for the sake of the gospel!
5. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

VI. PAUL AND BARNABAS RETURN TO ANTIOCH IN SYRIA

Acts 14:21-28: *²¹They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, ²²strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said. ²³Paul 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. ²⁴After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, ²⁵and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.

²⁶From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. ²⁷On 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. ²⁸And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

- A. “They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said. (vv.21-22)
1. The apostles’ ministry bore much fruit in Derbe, winning a large number of disciples there.
 2. They then **returned to Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch**—all places where they had met with fierce opposition—but behold the boldness and courage of these men, risking their very lives for the sake of the gospel!
 3. The apostles had begun their journey back to Antioch in Syria, but not by the shortest route; they backtracked through each city where they had established churches to follow up on all of the disciples there. Apostolic ministry involves both the planting of seed and subsequent watering of it (see 1 Cor. 3:6-8).
 4. They encouraged and strengthened all of the Christians, but they did not “sugar-coat” their message—they made it very clear that they would have to endure many hardships and persevere in their faith to enter the kingdom of God.
- B. “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.” (v.23)
1. This is the second mention of elders in the Book of Acts, mentioned first in Acts 11:30 where a financial gift was sent to the elders in Judea. Elders are local church ministers (ordained by the apostolic ministry).

2. “Each church” needed elders (always plural, as explained further).
3. Note that the apostles did not appoint elders on their initial visit when the church was first founded. Rather, it was after the passage of time when the churches were revisited that this was done. During the intervening time, there was opportunity for those who had been made elders by the Holy Spirit to become manifest.
4. **Elders** (syn. with bishops, overseers, shepherds or pastors) – local leaders who care for, watch over, and direct the affairs of the church, feeding the flock through teaching and preaching sound doctrine:
 - a) **Acts 20:17, 28:** ¹⁷*From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the **elders** of the church...* ²⁸*Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the **Holy Spirit** has made you overseers. Be **shepherds** of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood.*
 - b) **Tit. 1:5-9:** ⁵*The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint **elders** in every town, as I directed you.* ⁶*An **elder** must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.* ⁷*Since an **overseer** is **entrusted with God’s work**, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.* ⁸*Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.* ⁹*He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he **can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.***
 - c) **1 Tim. 3:1-8:** ¹*Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an **overseer**, he desires a noble task.* ²*Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,* ³*not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.* ⁴*He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper*

respect. ⁵(If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he **take care of God's church?**)
⁶He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. ⁷He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. ⁸**Deacons...**

- d) **1 Tim. 5:17-18:** ¹⁷The elders who **direct the affairs of the church** well are worthy of double honor, especially those **whose work is preaching and teaching.** ¹⁸For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages."
- e) Paul was likely referring to the same group in his second letter to Timothy:
2 Tim. 2:2: *And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to **reliable men** who will also be **qualified to teach others.***
- f) **Phil. 1:1:** *Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the **overseers** and deacons...*
- g) **"Elders"** [Gk. *presbuteros* = "a senior; presbyter;" found in Acts 11:30; 14:23; **15:2, 4, 6, 22-23; 16:4** – "apostles & elders;" 1 Tim. 5:17, 19; Tit. 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Pet. 5:1]
- h) **"Overseers"** [Gk. *episcopo* or *episkopos* = "inspection; by implication superintendence; the office of a bishop or superintendent, that is, a Christian officer in general charge of a church; bishop, overseer;" used in Acts 20:28; Phil 1:1; Tit. 1:7]
- i) **"Shepherds"** [Gk. *poimaino* = "to tend as a shepherd; to feed, rule;" used in Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2]
- j) NOTE: In EVERY instance where elders or overseers are mentioned in the NT, there is a *plurality*—never just one!

C. After preaching in Pisidia, Pamphylia and Perga, the apostles went down to Attalia to sail back to Antioch. (vv.24-25)

D. “From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.” (vv.26-28)

1. This marked the end of their first missionary journey (after the better part of a year or more)—back to home base where they had first been commended to the grace of God—their work was now finished.
2. After the completion of their mission, as was their custom [see *Section IV.A.2* of Part 4 on p.51], the apostles gathered the Antioch church together to **report all that “God had done** through them,” *NOT* to boast about all that they had done for God!
3. **God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.**
 - a) Faith is the only door or entrance into the kingdom of God, and God is the doorkeeper—He must open the door.
 - b) This is similar to the statement made by the apostles and elders in the Jerusalem church after hearing Peter’s testimony about his ministry at the house of Cornelius: “So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.” (Acts 11:18)
 - c) This places profound emphasis on what had happened at Pisidian Antioch, where the apostles declared that they were officially turning to the Gentiles with the message of salvation:

Acts 13:46-48: ⁴⁶*Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.*

⁴⁷*For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’”* ⁴⁸*When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and **all who were appointed for eternal life believed.***

d) Paul would later expound on this mystery in his epistle to the Romans, explaining that because of Israel's rejection of the gospel, a **temporary hardening** or blindness came upon them and a **temporary opening** of the door of salvation was being granted to the Gentiles:

(1) **Rom. 11:11-12, 25-26:** ¹¹*Again I ask: Did they [Israel] stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.* ¹²*But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!...*

²⁵*I do not want you to be ignorant of this **mystery**, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening **in part** ["partial, temporary"] UNTIL THE FULL NUMBER ["fullness" – KJV] OF THE GENTILES HAS COME IN.* ²⁶*And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; He will turn godlessness away from Jacob."*

(2) NOTE: Romans ch. 11 completely refutes the false teaching of Replacement Theology! The Church does not replace Israel—they are 2 separate entities.

(3) God opened the door of faith to the Gentiles, and He will close it when the last Gentile member is saved, added to the church, and the church is taken up in the rapture (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

e) As discussed at length in *Section III.D* on p.146, there is a mysterious interworking of God and man in the whole process of salvation: God opens the heart of the sinner (because of man's fallen, depraved nature) and disposes him to repent and believe; yet, He commands all men everywhere to repent and believe in order to be saved!

4. Paul and Barnabas would remain in Antioch for considerable time—estimates vary between one and two years (see Acts 15:35).

VII. THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

Acts 15:1-21: ¹Some 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.”

²This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. 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. ³The 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. ⁴When 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.

⁵Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.” ⁶The apostles and elders met to consider this question. ⁷After much discussion, 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. ⁸God, who knows the heart, showed that He accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as He did to us. ⁹He made no distinction between us and them, for He purified their hearts by faith. ¹⁰Now 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? ¹¹No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

¹²The 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. ¹³When they finished, James spoke up: “Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴Simon has described to us how God at first showed His concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for Himself. ¹⁵The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: ¹⁶‘After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, ¹⁷that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear My name, says the Lord, who does these things’ ¹⁸that have been known for ages.

¹⁹“It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. ²⁰Instead 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. ²¹For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.”

- A. Luke understood the profound significance of the controversy that occasioned this meeting of the Council in Jerusalem; thus, he reports its proceedings in great detail in this chapter.
- B. “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.”** (v.1)
1. These men were likely from the “party of the Pharisees” (v.5); they were legalistic Judaizers who insisted that true Christians had to keep the Law of Moses, and the proof of such compliance was the rite of circumcision.
 2. In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul goes into great depth on this issue, explaining that salvation is based solely on faith in Christ, and any attempt to achieve salvation through works or observance of the Law of Moses is under a curse. He pronounced a curse on any Judaizers, calling them “false brothers” who were perverting the gospel of Christ:
 - a) **Gal. 3:10-12:** ¹⁰*All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.”* ¹¹*Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, “The righteous will live by faith.”* ¹²*The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, “The man who does these things will live by them.”*
 - b) **Gal. 1:6-9:** ⁶*I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the One who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—⁷which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.* ⁸*But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!* ⁹*As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is*

preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

- C. “This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. 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.” (v.2)
1. Paul and Barnabas immediately recognized this to be a serious issue that challenged the very foundations of the Christian faith—it was a frontal attack on the gospel of grace: “*And if by grace, then it is no longer **by works**; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.*” (Rom. 11:6)
 2. The false teaching brought the apostles into **sharp dispute and debate** [“fierce protest” – MSG; “arguing vehemently” – NLT] with the Judaizers. [NOTE: Thank God for Christian leaders like Paul and Barnabas who are passionate and zealous for the essential truths of the gospel!]
 3. Paul and Barnabas, the apostles [“sent ones”], are again *appointed* and *sent* by the Antioch church to go to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the apostles and elders there.
- D. On their way to Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas visited the churches in Phoenicia and Samaria, strengthening the believers there and testifying about the conversion of the Gentiles. (v.3)
- E. “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.” (v.4)
1. This is the second reference to the *elders* in Jerusalem [see Acts 11:30 and *Section VI.B* on p.163].
 2. As was their custom, the **apostles gave a detailed report** of everything “**God had done** through them” [see *Section IV.A.2* of Part 4 on p.51].
 3. It seems that from this point onward, it was an open meeting with the entire church present, for “the whole assembly” is mentioned in v.12.

- F. “Then some of the believers who belonged to the **party of the Pharisees** stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the Law of Moses.” The apostles and elders met to consider this question. (vv.5-6)
1. These were Christian believers; yet, because of their loyalty to the Pharisee party, they insisted that faith in Christ alone was not sufficient—Moses must also be followed.
 2. Luke again expressed the crux of the matter: Should Gentile believers be required to keep the Law of Moses?
 3. This was the question the apostles and elders met to consider.
- G. “After much discussion, **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. 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? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.’” (vv.7-11)
1. **Four leaders** would address the controversy openly in the Council meeting: **Peter**, then **Paul and Barnabas**, and finally, **James**.
 2. Peter used the testimony of his ministry in the house of Cornelius to make several important points:
 - a) They simply heard the gospel message and believed without being circumcised or trying to follow the Law of Moses;
 - b) God gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit before they had an opportunity to take water baptism or perform any religious work, openly showing that He had accepted them just as they were;
 - c) God made no distinction between these Gentiles and the Jews;

- d) He purified their hearts, not by observance of the Law, but by faith;
3. Peter charged the Judaizers with “testing God” and putting a heavy yoke of bondage on the necks of disciples which neither they nor their Jewish fathers had been able to bear. Perhaps Peter was remembering the words of the Lord Jesus:
- a) **Mat. 23:1-4, 13:** ¹*Then Jesus said to the crowds and to His disciples:* ²*“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. ³So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. ⁴They tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them... ¹³“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! **You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.***
- b) **Mat. 11:29-30:** ²⁹*Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For **My yoke is easy and My burden is light.***
4. Peter concluded his remarks with a simple yet powerful summary of God’s answer to the whole question: “We believe **it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved**, just as they are.” (v.11)
- a) Grace and grace alone—grace intermingled with works is no longer grace!
- b) “We are saved just as they [Gentiles] are,” reinforcing his argument a second time that God now makes **NO DISTINCTION** between Jews and Gentiles.
- H. “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)
1. The crowd had become silent after hearing Peter’s appeal, and continued spellbound, as it were, listening intently to Barnabas and Paul’s amazing testimonies.

2. Barnabas and Paul (note the change in the order of the names in the Jerusalem setting, Barnabas being better known there) would support Peter’s arguments with much more evidence from their recent missionary journey to Cyprus and Asia Minor.
 3. No doubt, Barnabas and Paul went into great detail about their first apostolic mission, but Luke spares the details, having reported them quite thoroughly in chapters 13 and 14 of Acts.
 4. Certainly the speeches of Peter, Barnabas and Paul had clarified the controversy in many minds, but one final voice still needed to be heard...James would give the “closing arguments!”
- I. “When they finished, **James** spoke up: ‘Brothers, listen to me.’” (v.13)
1. This is James, the Lord’s brother, a leader in the Jerusalem church and author of the epistle that bears his name.
 2. He is not to be confused with James, the son of Zebedee (the apostle John’s brother) who was executed by Herod [see Acts 12:2 and *Section IX.G* of Part 7 on p.125].
- J. “Simon has described to us how **God at first showed His concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for Himself.**” (v.14)
1. James masterfully takes Peter’s words and wields them as a double-edged sword on his predominantly Jewish audience;
 2. Basically, what he was stating was that, just as God had lovingly taken the nation of Israel to be His people out of all the nations [Heb. *goyim* = “Gentiles”] of the earth (Ex. 19:4-6; Deut. 14:2), so now He was showing His concern for the Gentiles by taking from all the Gentiles a people (Christian believers) for Himself.
- K. “The **words of the prophets are in agreement with this**, as it is written: ‘After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who

bear My name, says the Lord, who does these things that have been known for ages.” (vv.15-19)

1. James quotes an obscure and fascinating passage of Scripture from Amos 9:11-12 that centers on two main points that pertain to the issue at hand: 1) the rebuilding of David’s fallen tent or tabernacle; 2) so that Gentiles may seek the Lord.
2. When the Ark of the Covenant was finally brought back to David in Jerusalem, it was placed, not in the Tabernacle of Moses, but in **David’s Tabernacle**—a simple tent which he pitched:
 - a) **2 Sam. 6:16-17; 7:1-2:** ¹⁶*As the ark of the LORD was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, she despised him in her heart. ¹⁷**They brought the ark of the LORD and set it in its place inside the tent that David had pitched for it, and David sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before the LORD...*** ¹*After the king was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ²he said to Nathan the prophet, “Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while **the ark of God remains in a tent.**”*
 - b) The Tabernacle of Moses was an extremely complex structure with a very complicated order of worship; it was strictly for the Jewish people, and only priests were allowed inside the Tabernacle proper; furthermore, only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies once a year to stand in the presence of God;
 - c) By contrast, David’s Tabernacle was greatly simplified—it was just a tent with the ark inside; David was not a Levite or priest, yet he would go right into the tent to enjoy the presence of God there any time he wanted to seek the Lord!
3. It was easy for David to come into the presence of God in his tent, and this is the real sense that James expressed in his interpretation of Amos’ prophecy...

4. In a broader sense, throughout the Book of Acts, it has been repeatedly emphasized that through the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, the Son of David, God fulfilled his dynastic promises to David (see Acts 2:25-36; 13:23, 32-37). This may also be what is understood by the rebuilding of David's fallen tent.
- L. "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should **not make it difficult for the Gentiles** who are turning to God." (v.19)
1. "Not make it difficult" [Gk. *arenochleo* = "to harass, annoy, trouble"].
 2. God in His grace had made a new and living way into the Holiest of All through the blood of Jesus (Heb. 10:19-20)—an easy approach by simply coming in "full assurance of faith," not by burdensome religious works.
 3. So why make it difficult and burdensome (similar to Peter's argument about putting a heavy yoke of bondage on the necks of Gentile disciples)?
 4. James didn't directly address the matter of requiring Gentiles to be circumcised, but those present who had ears to hear understood that they needed to stop troubling and harassing new Gentile believers with Moses' demands.
 5. God never intended for the Christian life to be grievous, oppressive or burdensome for anyone (1 John 5:3). That is good news!
- M. "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." (v.20)
1. It might seem at first that James was reversing his position, enforcing a form of legalism. But he was not putting them back under the law—his advice had nothing to do with the question of salvation—that issue had already been settled.
 2. But this advice had to do with the very practical matter of table fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers. Two of his three directives dealt with forbidden foods:
 - a) Food polluted by (offered to) idols (see 1 Cor. 8);
 - b) Meat of strangled animals and blood – this prohibition was given long before the Law of Moses (Gen. 9:4),

and thus applies to all mankind, not just the nation of Israel;

3. While obedience to these instructions was not a condition of salvation, it was certainly of great importance to avoid being a stumbling block to another brother or causing divisions and conflicts in the early church.
4. In most cities, Gentile believers had to live alongside Jewish believers who had been brought up to observe the Levitical food restrictions and to avoid contact with Gentiles as far as possible. If there was to be free association between these two groups, certain guidelines were needed to see that they lived together in harmony.
5. **Abstinence from sexual immorality** is quite different from the other food matters; nowhere in Scripture is this command ever revoked. Paul would later write to the Corinthians that such sins are in a class all their own, bringing defilement to the body which is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:9-20)

N. “For **Moses has been preached in every city** from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.” (v.21)

1. This explains the advice given in v.20. There were Jews in every city that for generations had been taught that it was wrong to do these things that James warned against.
2. Gentiles would need to cultivate sensitivity to their Jewish brethren so as to avoid offending them.

VIII. THE COUNCIL’S LETTER TO GENTILE BELIEVERS

Acts 15:22-35: ²²*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.* ²³*With them they sent the following letter:*

The apostles and elders, your brothers, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings.

²⁴*We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said.* ²⁵*So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and*

Paul—²⁶men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. ²⁸It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: ²⁹You 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.

Farewell.

³⁰The men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. ³¹The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. ³²Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers. ³³After spending some time there, they were sent off by the brothers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them, ³⁴[but Silas decided to remain there.] ³⁵But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.

- A. “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)
1. The outcome of the Council was clear: it had been definitely resolved that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised or observe the Law of Moses in order to be saved.
 2. It is worth noting how wonderfully the Holy Spirit united the church and helped them move past what could have ended in a disastrous church split or division: “the apostles and elders, with **the whole church**, decided...” Once again, they were “one in heart and mind” (Acts 4:32).
 3. **Judas** (Barsabbas) and **Silas** were chosen to accompany Paul and Barnabas on their return to Antioch:
 - a) They were both “leaders” and “prophets” (v.32) in the Jerusalem church;

- b) This was to show that the decision being delivered from the Jerusalem Council was genuine and fully accredited by the Jerusalem church. Since trouble had arisen because of the unauthorized activity of the previous Jerusalem visitors to Antioch (vv.1, 24), it was necessary to emphasize that the present delegates, whose business it was to undo the damage caused by those earlier visitors, were coming under the full authority of the Jerusalem church.
 - c) Judas had the same surname as that of Joseph Barsabbas, one of the two proposed to replace Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:23), and the two may have been brothers.
 - d) Remember the name Silas, for he will take on a very significant role later on when he replaces Barnabas as Paul's companion on his second missionary journey.
- B. "With them they sent **the following letter**: The apostles and elders, your brothers, **To the Gentile believers** in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings." (v.23)
- 1. Luke gives the contents of a letter from the Jerusalem Council which Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas were commissioned to deliver to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia.
 - 2. There was no need to send such a letter to the Jewish believers there for the law had already taught them these things (v.20)
- C. "We have heard that **some went out from us without our authorization** and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said." (v.24)
- 1. The Judaizers had acted on their own, without the authorization of the apostles, elders or church; that is not how things were done in the early church! We have seen time and again how even the apostles had to be *sent* by the church—no one was acting on their own authority.
 - 2. They had brought confusion with their false teachings; disturbing, unsettling and troubling the Gentile believers' minds [see *Section VII.L* on p.175].

- D. **“So we all agreed** to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul—men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing.” (vv.25-27)
1. “So we all agreed” [“it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord – NKJV] – note once again the wonderful unity that had resulted from their council meeting—they were in unanimous agreement!
 2. “Our dear friends Barnabas and Paul—men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
 - a) The selfless character of Barnabas and Paul was widely known;
 - b) Having risked their very lives for the name of Jesus Christ, they could be trusted now in this very important matter.
 3. As further confirmation, Judas and Silas would give verbal testimony to the truth of the Council’s decisions.
- E. “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. Farewell. (vv.28-29)
1. **“It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...”**
 - a) This is a Scripture of profound significance: the leaders of the early church knew the Holy Spirit and what He wanted—they were accustomed to being led by the Spirit, listening to the Holy Spirit, and discerning what seemed good to Him!
 - b) Whatever the Holy Spirit wanted, they wanted; whatever seemed good to the Holy Spirit seemed good to them as well! This is the real secret to church unity—not some human, ecumenical attempt to come into oneness—it is everyone being tuned in to the same “frequency” of the Holy Spirit!

- c) No wonder many modern church leaders end up in conflicts with one another, quarreling and bickering over *what seems good to them!*

James 4:1-3: *¹What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ²You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. ³When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

- d) It is paramount that the church learns this lesson, for Christ is coming for a bride who is one with the Holy Spirit—she and the Holy Spirit have one voice, one single desire:

Rev. 22:17: *The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.*

2. “**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.” (vv.28-29)
- a) The letter emphasized the Council’s decision that salvation is by grace, and the good news is that God’s way is not heavy or burdensome.
- b) It then listed the same guidelines given by James, encouraging the Gentiles that they would do well to follow them.
- F. “The men were sent off 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.” (vv.30-31)
1. The Council’s message was liberating and encouraging—good news brings gladness and freedom!
 2. Great relief and consolation had replaced the harassment and trouble brought earlier by the legalistic Judaizers.

- G. **“Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets**, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers. 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, [but Silas decided to remain there.]” (vv.32-34)
1. The prophetic ministry of Judas and Silas brought great blessing to the Antioch church.
 2. Judas and the others would return to Jerusalem, but God had other plans for Silas!
- H. “But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.” (v.35)
1. Paul and Barnabas would continue their ministry in Antioch, possibly for 1-2 years between the time of their return from the first missionary journey and the next.
 2. This was an exciting time for the Antioch church—a time of great growth and encouragement.

IX. PAUL AND BARNABAS SEPARATE

Acts 15:36-41: ³⁶*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.”* ³⁷*Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them,* ³⁸*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.* ³⁹*They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus,* ⁴⁰*but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.* ⁴¹*He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.*

- A. “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.’” (v.36)
1. What a love Paul had for the church—he carried a deep concern for all the churches in his heart daily (2 Cor. 11:28).
 2. He understood the importance of going back and visiting all of the converts in each town where he had preached,

watering the seed that had been sown and confirming the souls of the believers.

3. Paul was ready and willing to risk his own life and go back to “all the towns where we have preached”—towns where they had met fierce opposition, and at least one town where he was stoned and left for dead!
- B. “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. **They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company.**” (vv.37-39a)
1. Contention arose between Paul and Barnabas over taking John Mark, Barnabas’ cousin, with them on their next apostolic mission; Mark had deserted them at the beginning of their first missionary journey [see *Section III.A* on p.142], and Paul probably feared he would do the same again. So sharp was their dispute that they parted company, never to work together again!
 2. This story of the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas does not make pleasant reading, but Luke’s realism in recording it helps us to remember that the two men, as they themselves said to the people of Lystra, were “only men, human like you” (Acts 14:15).
 3. Paul would later write that “neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything” (1 Cor. 3:7) and that we must be very careful not to exalt human flesh—even if they are apostles!

1 Cor. 4:6-7: *⁶Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, “Do not go beyond what is written.” Then you will **not take pride in one man over against another.** ⁷For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?*

4. Luke does not relate the dispute in such a way as to put Paul in the right and Barnabas in the wrong. The question, however, inevitably arises, “Who was right, Paul or Barnabas?”

5. As in almost every dispute, there is usually fault on both sides.
 - a) Barnabas was probably swayed in his judgment by his carnal relationship to Mark and his natural affection for him.
 - b) Paul may have been too harsh, not willing to give Mark a second chance; perhaps Paul regretted his actions later in life (see below).
 - c) Verse 39 indicates that there was sharp contention between Paul and Barnabas. Prov. 13:10 clearly states that all strife, contention and quarrels come only “by pride,” so in that sense, they were both guilty of pride and stubbornness.
 - d) Those who take Paul’s side point out that Barnabas disappears from the story, never to be heard from again. Also, Paul and Silas were commended by the brothers to the grace of God, but there is no mention of that concerning Barnabas and John Mark.
 - e) In any event, it is heartening to see that in his latter days, Paul had a change of heart concerning Mark. It is quite possible that Mark had also experienced a change of heart, maturing under the tutelage of his uncle Barnabas, the Son of Encouragement, and winning the confidence of Paul once again:
 - (1) **2 Tim. 4:11:** *Only Luke is with me. **Get Mark** and bring him with you, because **he is helpful to me in my ministry.***
 - (2) **Col. 4:10:** *My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does **Mark**, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; **if he comes to you, welcome him.**)*

C. “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.” (vv.39b-41)

1. Interestingly, both Barnabas and Paul leave for their homelands—Barnabas to Cyprus and Paul to Cilicia (where Tarsus was located).
2. Paul and Silas got right to work “strengthening the churches;” sadly, nothing more is ever heard of Barnabas.

X. CONCLUSION

- A. In Acts 13 & 14, Luke records the details of the first apostolic mission sent forth from the Antioch church. From start to finish, it was the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. When Paul and Barnabas returned from their trip, they would report to the church “what God had done through them.”
- B. In Pisidian Antioch, a watershed moment took place where the apostles officially turned from the Jews to the Gentiles. They would later summarize the event with these words: “God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.”
- C. The pattern we have seen in previous chapters of Acts continued throughout Paul’s 1st missionary journey: the preaching of the word with great power and boldness, God confirming His word with miraculous signs and wonders, multitudes of new converts turning to Christ, more and more churches being established, and great opposition and persecution!
- D. In Acts 15, the entire church had to come together to address a serious doctrinal question that had arisen: Should Gentile believers be required to follow the Jewish laws and customs of Moses? After meeting together in Jerusalem, the apostles, elders and church came to a unanimous decision that resolved the controversy. They all agreed that Gentiles should not have to be under the yoke of Mosaic Law, affirming that salvation is by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. A letter was drafted with a few simple guidelines concerning forbidden foods and sexual conduct.
- E. As Paul and Barnabas made preparations for their 2nd apostolic mission, there arose a sharp disagreement over whether or not to take John Mark with them. Unable to resolve the matter peacefully, Paul and Barnabas parted company. That such embarrassing and unpleasant matters are recorded in Scripture is actually one of the greatest proofs that the Bible is the word of God, not man. If the writings were inspired by man, he would have left out all of the bad stuff. He would not have told about Adam and Eve’s fall, Noah’s drunkenness, Abraham’s lying, Jacob’s trickery and deception, David’s adultery and murder, Peter’s three denials of Christ, and on and on we could go!
- F. Technically, Paul’s second missionary journey, the subject of Part 9 in this study, commences in Acts 15.40 with his departure through Syria to Cilicia. More about that next time...

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Part 9 – Paul’s 2nd Missionary Journey

(15:40-18:22)

(No. 1119.9 – - NLC)

I. PAUL AND SILAS JOINED BY TIMOTHY IN LYSTRA

Acts 15:40-16:5: ⁴⁰But Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

^{16:1}He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. ²The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. 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. ⁴As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. ⁵So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

A. Paul and Silas came to **Derbe and **Lystra** (Acts 16:1)**

1. Paul visited the cities he and Barnabas had evangelized two or three years earlier—Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and likely Pisidian Antioch.
2. The order of towns is reversed from his first journey since they were approaching them from the opposite direction on this trip.
3. Certainly Paul had vivid memories of the stoning he had received previously in Lystra, but that did not deter him from returning to visit the believers there, risking his own safety.

B. **Timothy in Lystra**

1. This is the first mention of Timothy in the New Testament (see Acts 17:14-15; 18:5; 19:22; 20:4; Rom. 16:21; 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10; 2 Cor. 1:1, 19; Phil. 1:1; 2:19; Col. 1:1; 1 & 2 Timothy; Phile. 1:1; Heb. 13:23).

2. As mentioned previously [see *Section V.F.3* of Part 8 on p.162], Timothy may have been converted through Paul’s ministry during his first visit to Lystra.
 3. Timothy’s mother (Eunice) and grandmother (Lois) were both Jewish believers (2 Tim. 1:5); his father was a Greek and may have already died by this time—nothing is said of his faith, so it is generally presumed that he was neither a convert to Judaism nor a believer in Christ.
 4. Timothy was a disciple and he had a good testimony in the churches of Lystra and Iconium (v.2).
- C. “Paul wanted to take him [**Timothy**] 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)
1. As Paul would refer to Timothy as a “youth” or “young man” some 15 years later (see 1 Tim. 4:12), some believe he as only a teenager at this time.
 2. Not only did the early apostles always travel in pairs [see *Section II.A* of Part 8 on p.136], they would often take younger disciples such as John Mark and Timothy along with them for practical training and ministerial experience. What a privilege for Timothy to be chosen by Paul to accompany him on this second missionary journey!
 3. Why did Paul insist on circumcising Timothy, when he had steadfastly refused to compel Titus to be circumcised some time previously (see Gal. 2:1-5)?
 - a) The Scripture clearly states that it was “because of the Jews who lived in that area.” Timothy was of mixed parentage, but because his mother was a Jewess, that made Timothy a Jew by law—an apostate Jew because he was uncircumcised; Titus was a Greek.
 - b) In the case of Titus, it was a question of fundamental Christian doctrine—false teachers had been insisting that Gentiles had to be circumcised in order to be saved, and Paul recognized this as an affront to the gospel of grace.
 - c) This case was entirely different. Paul, Silas, and Timothy were going forth on evangelistic work, and their first contacts would frequently be with Jews. If

these Jews knew that Timothy was an uncircumcised Jew, they might refuse to listen. So as a matter of expediency, not doctrine, Timothy was circumcised to eliminate an unnecessary hindrance to the preaching of the gospel to the Jews.

- d) Paul would later explain such practices in his letter to the Corinthians:

1 Cor. 9:19-22: ¹⁹*Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.* ²⁰**To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.** ²¹*To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.* ²²*To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.*

- D. “As they traveled from town to town, they **delivered the decisions** reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.” (vv.4-5)
1. Paul and Silas continued to deliver the letter drafted by the Jerusalem Council [see *Section VIII* of Part 8 on p.176] to the believers in all of the towns they visited.
 2. The churches were strengthened in faith and grew daily in numbers (see Acts 14:22); this is one of the many “progress reports” that Luke gives throughout the book of Acts [see *Section I.H.1* of Part 5 on p.72].
 3. It is important that churches grow *both* in **faith** and **numbers**—one without (or at the expense of) the other is meaningless.

II. THE MACEDONIAN CALL

Acts 16:6-10: ⁶*Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.* ⁷*When they came*

to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. ⁸So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. ⁹During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰After 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.

A. “Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of **Phrygia** and **Galatia**, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.” (vv.6-8)

1. These verses give us further insight into the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit in the apostles’ missionary strategies— on some occasions, He would open a door and say “Go”— at other times (such as seen in these verses), He would close doors and say “No, don’t go!”
2. Having revisited the churches in Phrygia and Galatia, they thought of continuing into the province of Asia, but they were “kept” from going by the Holy Spirit [Gk. *koluo* = “forbidden” – KJV, “blocked” – MSG].
3. Later, they actually tried to enter Bithynia and again they were not permitted; we are not told why, but these events should remind us that the times and seasons are set by the Father’s own authority (see Acts 1:7).

B. “During the night Paul had a **vision**...” (v.9)

1. Having received several prohibitions from the Spirit of God, Paul is finally given positive direction by way of a vision.
2. Note once again the **variety of ways in which the Holy Spirit directed** the efforts of the apostles and believers in the early church:
 - a) Jesus had given them the master plan in Acts 1:8: “You will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”
 - b) Peter was guided by the OT Scriptures in choosing a successor for Judas (Acts 1:15-26);

- c) An angel of the Lord directed Peter and the other apostles (after releasing them from prison) to go back to the temple courts and preach the gospel (Acts 5:19-20); an angel of the Lord guided Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26) and then translated him to Azotus, a town 30 miles away (Acts 8:39-40);
- d) On a number of occasions, they received messages through prophets (Acts 11:27-30; 13:1-2; 21:10-12);
- e) They often had an inner sense or witness of what the Holy Spirit wanted: “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (Acts 15:28); [see *Section VIII.E.1* of Part 8 on p.179]; Paul was often warned by the Holy Spirit about imprisonment and hardships (Acts 20:23);
- f) There were times that the Holy Spirit spoke directly to them: Instructions given to the apostles (Acts 1:2); Philip directed to approach the chariot of the Ethiopian (Acts 8:29); Peter on the roof in Joppa (Acts 10:19-20; 11:12);
- g) As noted above, they were at times forbidden by the Holy Spirit to go to certain places (Acts 16:6-7);
- h) They were often guided by circumstances: Peter and John were at the temple because it was the time of daily prayer (Acts 3:1); the disciples were scattered by persecution (Acts 8:1-4; 11:19; 13:50-51; 14:5-6); civil authorities asked Paul and Silas to leave Philippi (Acts 16:39-40), and Paul would be taken from Jerusalem to Caesarea by the authorities (Acts 23:33); Paul’s appeal to Caesar determined his trip to Rome (Acts 25:11), and shipwreck landed him in Malta (Acts 28:1), delaying his arrival in Rome.
- i) Guidance frequently came through the counsel and initiative of other Christians: The apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria when they heard how they have received the word of God (Acts 8:14); the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch (Acts 11:22); the brethren at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem (Acts 15:2); Judas and Silas were sent by the church at Jerusalem with Barnabas and Paul (Acts 15:25-27), etc.

- j) And on at least five occasions, men were guided by visions...
3. “Vision” [Gk. *horama* = “from *horao* = “to stare at, discern clearly, appear; something gazed at; a spectacle (especially supernatural)”]
 4. Visions were promised with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit: “your young men will see visions” (Acts 2:17), and were often employed by the Holy Spirit to give specific guidance and direction: (Acts 9:10 – Ananias; Acts 9:12 – Paul; Acts 10:3 – Cornelius; Acts 10:10-19 – Peter; Acts 18:9 – Paul).
- C. “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.” (vv.9-10)
1. This was a clear and specific call to Macedonia, which Paul immediately heeded.
 2. We are not told who the man was—some have speculated that it was the Philippian jailer who would be converted there (Acts 16:29-34)—but the man may have simply been a representative of the region crying out with their need for the gospel.
 3. “We got ready...” – this is the first “we” passage in Acts, indicating that Luke joined Paul and his other companions at Troas [see Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16].
 4. “Concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them...”
 - a) “Concluding” [Gk. *sumbibazo* = lit. “to drive or knit together; to unite, infer, prove together”];
 - b) They were all unanimous in their understanding that this was God directing them to Macedonia: “confidently inferring” – AMP or “assuredly gathering” – KJV;
 5. Now the gospel would reach Europe (modern Greece and neighboring nations)!

III. LYDIA'S CONVERSION IN PHILIPPI

Acts 16:11-15: ¹¹From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. ¹²From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days. ¹³On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. ¹⁵When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

- A. Paul and company reached Philippi, where Lydia and her household were converted and baptized.
- B. "On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there." (v.13)
 - 1. It was always Paul's practice to go first to the synagogue when he visited a new city, but there was no synagogue, indicating that there were not many Jews in Philippi (a minimum of ten married men were required to open a synagogue).
 - 2. So he went outside the city to the place where Jews would gather on the Sabbath, and they found a group of women there and preached the gospel to them.
- C. "One of those listening was a woman named **Lydia**, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message." (v.14)
 - 1. Lydia was likely a Gentile convert to Judaism; she had a heart for God—she was a sincere worshiper of God and had come to pray with the other women.
 - 2. She was "listening" and "the **Lord opened her heart** to respond to Paul's message."
 - a) Lydia's ears and heart were opened—she was keenly attentive to the good news;

- b) God opened her heart, granted her repentance, and enabled her to believe—then and only then could she respond [see *Section III.D* of Part 8 on pp.146-155 for an in-depth discussion on the mysterious workings of divine sovereignty and human responsibility].
- D. “When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. ‘If you consider me a believer in the Lord,’ she said, ‘come and stay at my house.’ And she persuaded us. (v.15)
1. Lydia responded in faith and obedience—she and her household were baptized and became faithful followers of Christ.
 2. She persuaded [lit. “constrained, compelled or pressed”] Paul and his companions to stay at her house.
 3. Lydia was Paul’s first convert in Europe.

IV. PAUL AND SILAS IN PRISON

Acts 16:16-24: ¹⁶Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. ¹⁷This 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.” ¹⁸She 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.

¹⁹When 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. ²⁰They brought them before the magistrates and said, “These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar ²¹by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.” ²²The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. ²³After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. ²⁴Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

- A. “Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the

future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling.” (v.16)

1. She had a “spirit of divination” (KJV, NAS)—[Gk. *Puthon* = “python (the diviner)”];
 2. This poor girl was twice a slave—not only was she a slave in the literal sense, but she was spiritually enslaved by Satan to do his bidding.
 3. She earned a great deal of money for her owners: To this day, people will spend a lot of money to have someone predict their future, even though such “fortune-telling” is demonically inspired; how ironic that they *could* know their future destiny simply by surrendering to the One who knows the end from the beginning and seeking Him who has already made plans for them (Jer. 29:11-14)!
 4. Let us be very clear here: astrology, horoscopes, palm readers, fortune tellers, séances, necromancy, Ouija boards, witchcraft, magic, tarot cards, divination, crystal gazers, clairvoyants, and any of a host of other occult practices (apart from seeking God and receiving revelation through His word and the Holy Spirit) that are used to learn about the future are DEMONIC!
- B. “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.” (vv.17-18)
1. During Christ’s earthly ministry, it was common for the demons to recognize Him and acknowledge who He was:
 - a) **Mark 1:23-26:** ²³*Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out,* ²⁴*“What do You want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the **Holy One of God!**”* ²⁵*“Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!”* ²⁶*The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.*
 - b) **Mark 5:7-8:** ⁷*He shouted at the top of his voice, “What do You want with me, **Jesus, Son of the Most High***

God? Swear to God that You won't torture me!"⁸ For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!"

2. All that the slave girl was saying about Paul and Silas was true; however, it was actually the *demon* who was testifying! Paul knew better than to receive testimony from an evil spirit.
 3. After hearing this testimony for many days, Paul finally became troubled in his spirit (v.17); this was the manifestation of the "discerning (distinguishing) of spirits," one of the gifts of the Spirit listed in 1 Cor. 12:10: the words were right, but the spirit was wrong! True discernment enables one to judge people and situations, not by what the eye sees or the ear hears, but by what the Holy Spirit discerns (see Isa. 11:1-4, a Messianic prophecy).
 4. Paul cast out the evil spirit of divination. Driving out demons was one of the signs Jesus said would accompany those disciples who believed (Mark 16:17-18), and it is seen throughout the book of Acts (Acts 5:16; 8:7; 19:12).
- C. "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." (v.19)
1. How the love of money can blind us—here a poor girl who had been bound by Satan was marvelously set free, and all her owners could think about was their financial loss!
 2. This is reminiscent of the Gadarene demoniac, out of whom Jesus had driven a legion of demons into a herd of 2,000 pigs; rather than rejoice and thank God for the man's deliverance, the people of the town were upset when they heard that their pigs had drowned in the lake, and began to "plead with Jesus to leave their region" (Mark 5:1-17).
 3. Once again a miracle had gotten the apostles into trouble!
- D. Without a trial, Paul and Silas were lynched, stripped, beaten, and flogged, before being thrown into prison and their feet fastened in stocks (vv.20-24).
1. NOTE: Up until this point, everything had gone smoothly with the missionaries' trip to Macedonia. Paul received a

divine call in a vision, and everyone agreed that it was the Lord sending them to Macedonia to preach the gospel. They met Lydia, and she and her whole household believed and were baptized. Paul had now freed a slave girl from demonic bondage, casting a spirit of divination out of her. Confirmation after confirmation—surely they were in the center of God’s will! Indeed they were, but we must never assume visions, divine appointments, and ministerial success exempt us from persecution, opposition and suffering.

2. Paul later complained to the officers of the city magistrates that even though they were Roman citizens, they were beaten publicly without a trial (v.37).

V. PHILIPPIAN JAILER CONVERTED

Acts 16:25-40: ²⁵About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody’s chains came loose. ²⁷The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”

²⁹The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” ³¹They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” ³²Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. ³⁴The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family.

³⁵When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: “Release those men.” ³⁶The jailer told Paul, “The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace.” ³⁷But Paul said to the officers: “They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman

citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out.”

³⁸*The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed.*

³⁹*They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city.* ⁴⁰*After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia’s house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left.*

A. “**About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing** hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.” (v.25)

1. Having been lynched, publicly beaten with rods and flogged, thrown into the inner cell of the prison, their feet locked most uncomfortably in stocks, the apostles were praying and singing at midnight! What kind of men were these?
2. Anybody can sing when the prison doors are open and he is free as a bird; but hymns that arise from the darkest dungeon of pain and suffering are what Scripture calls “the sacrifice of praise” (Heb. 13:15-16), and oh how it pleases the Most High!
3. This was so amazing that it awoke all the other prisoners—they were listening to them.
 - a) MSG: “The other prisoners couldn’t believe their ears.”
 - b) The others heard heavenly joy coming from the inner prison, not groans and cursing.

B. “Suddenly there was such a **violent earthquake** that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody’s chains came loose.” (v.26)

1. This was not an ordinary earthquake—this was a supernatural event.
2. Although the foundations of the prison were shaken, apparently there was no damage to the building, and no one was injured by the quake.
3. Not only were all the doors opened, but the prisoners’ chains were unlocked!

- C. “The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, ‘Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!’” (vv.27-28)
1. Awakened by the earthquake and seeing that the prison doors had been opened, the jailer naturally assumed that all the prisoners had made their escape.
 2. The jailer knew full well that the escape of the prisoners would cost him his life, so he was about to commit suicide when Paul stopped him.
 3. None of the prisoners had tried to escape, perhaps because they were in awe of Paul and Silas and recognized the supernatural nature of the events that had just occurred.
 4. Note Paul’s concern for this jailer’s soul: “Don’t harm yourself!” He could have easily let him fall on the sword, and he and Silas make their way to freedom. But Paul quite possibly recognized this was a divine appointment.
- D. “The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, ‘**Sirs, what must I do to be saved?**’” (vv.29-30)
1. How suddenly God can change a situation—the jailer who had the power to lock these men in the stocks had now fallen to his knees, trembling before Paul and Silas!
 2. He referred to them as “Sirs;” this is the Greek word *kurios*, the word normally translated “Lord” and literally means “supreme in authority.” In simpler terms, the jailer was now acknowledging that Paul and Silas were in charge!
 3. “What must I do to be saved?”
 - a) It is doubtful that he was asking about his personal safety.
 - b) He realized the prison doors had been miraculously opened, the bonds of all the prisoners loosed, and not one of them had escaped; hence, he could not feel himself in danger of losing his life on this account.

- c) It is more likely that he, like the prisoners, sensed something overwhelmingly supernatural and divine was happening.
 - d) This question was a good sign that the Holy Spirit was already at work in the jailer’s heart; it is similar to the one asked by the crowd on the Day of Pentecost: “What should we do? (Acts 2:37)
- E. “They replied, **‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.’** Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family. (vv.31-34)
1. “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” – it is significant to note throughout the book of Acts how *simple* was the gospel they preached! (See Acts 2:38-39; 3:19-20; 8:5, 37).
 2. “And your household” – salvation has always been for the entire family or household; this pattern is seen throughout Scripture: (1) Noah and his whole family were saved in the ark, a type of Christ’s salvation; (2) the Passover lamb, a type of Christ, was for the entire house (Ex. 12:3); (3) Lydia and the members of her household were all saved and baptized (Acts 16:15).
 3. That is not to imply that the other members of the family would be saved apart from each one actively placing his/her faith in Christ and being baptized; thus the apostles were careful to preach the gospel to all the others in the jailer’s house, each one responding in faith and being baptized.
 4. All were baptized “at that hour of the night;” this confirms what we have already noted repeatedly throughout the book of Acts: baptism took place immediately after conversion—it was not a public testimony or church ceremony—it was a simple act of obedience to the gospel (see Acts 8:36-38).

5. The jailer was filled with joy [lit. “leaped much for joy”] because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family. The “joy of salvation” was the proof of the genuineness of his conversion.
- F. After a brief exchange with the officers of the Philippian magistrates, Paul and Silas were escorted out of the jail and visited Lydia again before leaving the city (vv.35-40).
- G. It is interesting to note the three individuals from Philippi, singled out by Luke, whose lives were radically changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ— they were so different from one another—**Lydia**, a God-fearing businesswoman of reputable character; a demon-possessed **slave girl**; and a **jailer**; this shows in a dramatic way how the saving power of Jesus can reach the most diverse types of men and women! *Anyone* who believes can be saved!

VI. PAUL AND SILAS IN THESSALONICA

Acts 17:1-9: ¹When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. ²As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ,” he said. ⁴Some 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.

⁵But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason’s house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. ⁶But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: “These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, ⁷and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.” ⁸When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. ⁹Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.

- A. “When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to **Thessalonica**, where there was a Jewish

synagogue. As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days...” (vv.1-2)

1. Thessalonica was the capital of the province of Macedonia with a population of 200,000 and, being strategically located on trade routes, was an important commercial center. It would serve as a base from which the gospel would spread out in many directions.
 2. Unlike Philippi, Thessalonica had a large colony of Jews and thus a synagogue.
 3. “As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue...” – [see notes in *Section IV.A.1* on p.150 of Part 8].
 4. Presumably for three consecutive Sabbaths, Paul met with them; it is not clear if he was in Thessalonica for more than three weeks, although it seems his visit was cut short by opposition (vv.8-10);
- B. “He *reasoned* with them from the Scriptures, *explaining* and *proving* that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. ‘This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ,’ he said.” (vv.2-3)
1. “**Reasoned**” [Gk. *dialegomai* = “to say thoroughly, discuss (in argument or exhortation); dispute, preach (unto), reason (with), speak”];
 2. “From the Scriptures” – Paul used the Old Testament to show them Christ, just as Jesus Himself had done with the two disciples after His resurrection; contrast the strategy Paul used with the Jews here with that employed when he addressed the Greeks in Athens (where he quoted Greek poets rather than the Scriptures – see 1 Cor. 9:20-23);
 3. “**Explaining**” [Gk. *dianoigo* = “to open thoroughly, expound”] – Luke uses the same verb used in his gospel (there translated “opened”) where Jesus made clear what the Scriptures were teaching about Himself:
Luke 24:25-27, 44-46: ²⁵*He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter His glory?” ²⁷And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He **explained** to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself...*

⁴⁴He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

⁴⁵Then he **opened** their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day...

4. “**Proving**” [Gk. *paratithemi* = “to place alongside, allege, put forth, set before”]
 5. **Acts 17:3 (AMP)**: *Explaining [them] and [quoting passages] setting forth and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, This Jesus, Whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ (the Messiah).*
 6. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ” – Paul boldly declared Jesus to be the Messiah.
- C. “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. But the **Jews were jealous**; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and **started a riot** in the city. They rushed to Jason’s house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. (vv.4-5)
1. A familiar refrain... a few Jews believed, many God-fearing Greeks and women were converted, and the other Jews became jealous!
 2. As was their habit, the Jews incited *others* to do their dirty work (see Acts 13:50)—this time they rounded up some hoodlums (ruffians, rascals, loungers, lewd fellows) from the street to start a riot.
 3. Paul, in his epistle to this church, remembered the rage and enmity of the Jews against him and the gospel:
1 Thess. 2:14-16: ¹⁴*For you, brothers, became imitators of God’s churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, ¹⁵who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men ¹⁶in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be*

saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.

4. Paul and Silas had been staying at Jason's house, so the mob went there to bring them out.
- D. "But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: 'These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.' When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go." (vv.6-9)
1. Not finding Paul and Silas at Jason's house, they dragged Jason before the city officials and made him post bond for the apostles.
 2. "City officials" [Gk. *politarches* = "politarch, city ruler," used in vv.6, 8]; interestingly, this Greek word is found nowhere else in Greek literature, but in 1835 it was discovered inscribed on an arch in Thessalonica and is now preserved in the British Museum in London.
 3. Their charge against Paul and Silas: "These men have **caused trouble** ["turned the world upside down" – NKJV, AMP] all over the world... defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus."
 - a) This was actually a great compliment they were paying to the apostles, for they were simply following the One who declared that He had not come to bring peace, but a sword to the earth (Mat. 10:34).
 - b) This kingdom of God is radical, revolutionary—it cuts against the entire fallen world order—and it will one day overthrow all the kingdoms of this world (Rev. 11:15).
 - c) To be more precise, the present world *is* upside down—Jesus came to straighten it out!
 - d) How hypocritical of these Jewish accusers to pretend allegiance to Caesar or to feign concern that his decrees were not being obeyed—there was no love lost between them and the Roman Empire!

VII. PAUL AND SILAS IN BEREIA

Acts 17:10-15: ¹⁰As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. ¹²Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

¹³When 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. ¹⁴The brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. ¹⁵The men who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

- A. Forced to leave Thessalonica by night, Paul and Silas go to **Berea**, and make their way straight to the synagogue to preach Christ! (v.10)
- B. “Now the **Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians**, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.” (vv.11-12)
 - 1. The Bereans showed better character than the Thessalonian Jews who had rejected the gospel and stirred up trouble.
 - 2. They searched the Old Testament Scriptures for themselves, checking to see if what Paul was teaching was true; many of them opened their hearts and believed.
- C. When the Jews in Thessalonica heard that Paul was preaching in Berea, they went there to stir up more trouble (v.13).
- D. Once again, Paul had to be evacuated, being escorted by some brothers out of Berea to Athens; Silas and Timothy remained in Berea (vv.14-15)
 - 1. The rage and persecution seemed to be directed principally against Paul, so Silas and Timothy remained with instructions to join Paul in Athens as soon as possible.

2. NOTE; Timothy had probably been left at Philippi, only later rejoining Paul and Silas here in Berea; the three were working very closely in these regions, as evidenced by the opening salutation in both of Paul’s epistles to the Thessalonians: “Paul, Silas and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians” (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1).

VIII. PAUL IN ATHENS

Acts 17:16-21: ¹⁶While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, “What is this babbler trying to say?” Others remarked, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods.” They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

¹⁹Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? ²⁰You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean.” ²¹(All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

- A. “While Paul was waiting for them in **Athens**, he was greatly distressed to see that the **city was full of idols.**” (v.16)
 1. Although Paul had given instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him in Athens, only Timothy is later mentioned as having joined Paul in Athens (1 Thess. 3:1-5);
 2. Five centuries before Paul’s visit, Athens had been at the height of its glory in philosophy, literature, and art; while the city was still the center of culture and education, those things were of no interest to Paul; this was not a sightseeing tour—he was burdened for the spiritual condition of the souls there.
 3. “The city was full of idols” [“wholly given to idolatry” – KJV, which is a more literal translation of the Greek here]; when man turns away from God, no amount of philosophy,

education, intellect or artistic talent can prevent him from sinking into the darkness and folly of idolatry:

Rom. 1:18-25: ¹⁸*The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness,* ¹⁹*since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.* ²⁰*For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.* ²¹*For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but **their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.*** ²²*Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools* ²³*and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.* ²⁴*Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.* ²⁵*They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and **worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator**—who is forever praised. Amen.*

- B. “So **he reasoned in the synagogue** with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as **in the marketplace day by day** with those who happened to be there. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, ‘What is this babbler trying to say?’ Others remarked, ‘He seems to be advocating foreign gods.’ They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.” (vv.17-18)
1. Paul took the gospel first to the synagogue, and then to the streets in the marketplace.
 2. **Epicurean** philosophers – they were followers of a philosopher named Epicurus, who taught that pleasure and not the pursuit of knowledge is the chief end of life.
 3. **Stoic** philosophers – they were pantheists who taught that people should live in accord with nature and suppress all desire; they believed that wisdom lay in being free from intense emotion and unmoved by joy or grief.

4. When these philosophers, with all of their so-called wisdom and learning, heard Paul preach the good news of Jesus and the resurrection, they called him a *babbler*.
 - a) “**Babbler**” [Gk. *spermologos* = “a seed picker (as the crow); a sponger, loafer, gossip or trifler in talk”] – they used this derogatory term to say that Paul was like a crow picking up whatever secondhand scraps of philosophy or crumbs of learning he could find and scattering them around without digesting them himself.
 - b) The wisdom of God was foolishness to these sages of Greek philosophy:

1 Cor. 1:18-25: ¹⁸*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* ¹⁹*For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”* ²⁰**Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?** ²¹*For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.* ²²*Jews demand miraculous signs and **Greeks look for wisdom,*** ²³*but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and **foolishness to Gentiles,*** ²⁴*but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.* ²⁵*For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.*

- C. “Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the **Areopagus**, where they said to him, ‘May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean.’ (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)” (vv.19-21)

1. Areopagus – lit. “Hill of Ares,” the Greek god of thunder and war whose Roman counterpart was Mars; the Court of the Areopagus exercised jurisdiction in moral and religious

matters; it served as the custodian of teachings that introduced new religions or foreign gods.

2. Apparently, the Athenians prided themselves on keeping current with all of the latest ideas and novel teachings, but Paul's ideas were *new* and *strange* for them.
3. Indeed, the story of God's love and redemption—sending His own Son to be a sacrifice for man's sins—is stranger than any fiction ever told! There has never been another story like it!

IX. PAUL ADDRESSES THE AREOPAGUS

Acts 17:22-34: ²²*Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³For 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.*

²⁴*"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. ²⁵And He is not served by human hands, as if He needed anything, because He Himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. ²⁶From one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. ²⁷God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. ²⁸"For in Him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are His offspring.'*

²⁹*"Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man's design and skill. ³⁰In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹For He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the man He has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising Him from the dead."*

³²*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." ³³At that, Paul left the Council. ³⁴A 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. “Paul then stood up in the **meeting of the Areopagus** and said: ‘Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are **very religious**. 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.’” (vv.22-23)

1. God had beautifully set the stage for Paul to preach the gospel to these scholars and thinkers, for they had specifically asked him to explain his new teachings to them (vv.19-20).

2. Commonly referred to as Paul’s “Mars Hill Address,” we see the master preacher go to work here; knowing he was addressing a Gentile audience, Paul used a totally different strategy than he would have in a Jewish synagogue [see *Section VI.B* on p.200]:

1 Cor. 9:20-23: ²⁰*To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. ²¹To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. ²²To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.*

a) There are no quotations from Scripture;

b) Rather, Paul quotes from Greek poets;

3. They did not have a background in the OT, so he had to find a subject of common interest with which to begin—he commended the Athenians for being very religious.

4. Paul used the inscription he saw on one of their altars, TO AN UNKNOWN GOD, as the “launch pad” for his message; it contained two important facts that he would build upon:

a) There *is* a God;

- b) The Athenians did not know Him—they were worshipping in ignorance.
5. Paul boldly informed them that the God they *didn't know* he *did know* and he would proclaim Him to them.
- B. “The **God who made the world** and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And He is not served by human hands, as if He needed anything, because He Himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.” (vv.24-26)
1. Paul begins with a point of reference of paramount importance that all people can relate to—the creation—a **revelation of the Creator** to all mankind:
Rom. 1:19-20: ¹⁹*Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because **God has made it plain to them.***
²⁰*For since **the creation of the world** God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that **men are without excuse.***
 2. NOTE: With our whole modern culture now dominated by atheistic, evolutionary teaching from kindergarten right through college, we can no longer assume that people know that God is Creator—we must challenge them to examine the facts and realize how secular education has lied to them through the false science of evolution:
1 Tim. 6:20 (KJV): *O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, **avoiding** profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of **science falsely so called.***
 3. Paul emphasized the biblical truth (without quoting Scripture) that God doesn't dwell in human temples, thus implying that all of the Athenian temples, altars, and idols were of no value.
 4. He continued in his discussion about origins, not only the origin of the universe, but the **origin of man** and all of the nations on earth: “From one man (Adam) He made every nation of men.”

5. Then Paul made a profound statement about God’s sovereign hand in human history and the various nations on earth: “**He determined the times set for them** [the nations] **and the exact places where they should live.**”
- C. “God did this **so that men would seek Him** and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.” (v.27)
1. “Reach out for Him [Gk. *pselaphao* = lit. “to feel after, grope for”];
 2. Paul was encouraging the Athenians (and anyone else), who were stumbling around in darkness and ignorance that if they would seek Him and grope in the dark for Him, they could find Him because He was not far from them.
 3. In other words, the “unknown God” is knowable—anyone who searches for Him will find Him (Jer. 29:13-14).
- D. “‘For in Him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are His offspring.’ Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man’s design and skill. (vv.28-29)
1. **Paul quoted two Greek poets** (something he did elsewhere as well: 1 Cor. 15:33; Tit. 1:12), showing the broad scope of his learning and knowledge of literature, and using the poetry to show the relationship between humanity and the supreme God:
 - a) “In Him we live and move and have our being” – this quotation is from the Cretan poet Epimenides (c. 600 B.C.);
 - b) “We are His offspring” – from the Cilician poet Aratus (c. 315 – 240);
 2. Paul affirmed that we are all God’s offspring in the sense that He created all of us; he was not entertaining the false notion of the universal brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God: we only become true sons of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
 3. He continued his argument stating that, if men are the offspring of God, then it is impossible to think of God as a gold or stone idol; these are crafted by human artisans, and

are therefore not as great as their human creators. The idols are, in a sense, the offspring of human beings, whereas human beings are the creation of God.

4. Acts 17:29 (MSG): Well, if we are the God-created, it doesn't make a lot of sense to think we could hire a sculptor to chisel a god out of stone for us, does it?
- E. "In the past **God overlooked such ignorance**, but now He **commands all people everywhere to repent**. For He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the man He has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising Him from the dead." (vv.30-31)
1. Having exposed the folly of their idolatry, Paul comforted the Athenians by informing them that God, in His great mercy, had up until this time, overlooked ["winked at" – KJV] their ignorance.
 2. Note the similarity to Paul's preaching in Lystra and to his letter to the Romans:
 - a) **Acts 14:16: *In the past, He let all nations go their own way.***
 - b) **Rom. 3:25: *God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood. He did this to demonstrate His justice, because **in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished...*****
 3. "But now..." – the light of truth and revelation had now come, so this would no longer be a sin of ignorance; the situation had changed—the coming of Christ marked a fresh start in God's dealings with the human race.
 4. "He commands all people everywhere to repent."
 - a) Repentance – to stop sinning, change one's heart, mind and attitude, and turn to God;
 - b) Commanded – not a suggestion or something to be considered—this is an *order* from the Sovereign God to all people everywhere!

5. Why? Paul gives two reasons:
- a) **Judgment:** *“For He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the Man He has appointed.”*
 - (1) God, the “Judge of all the earth” (Gen. 18:25) and the “Judge of all men” (Heb. 12:23), has already set the date on His calendar when He will judge the world (Heb. 9:27);
 - (2) He has appointed the Man (not an angel), Christ Jesus, to whom He has committed the execution of all judgment (John 5:24-27).
 - b) **Resurrection of Christ:** *“He has given proof of this to all men by raising Him from the dead.”*
 - (1) Christ gave “many infallible proofs” (Acts 1:3) that He was alive after His crucifixion;
 - (2) With over 500 eyewitness accounts of Christ’s resurrection (1 Cor. 15:6), God has given credible evidence, assurance, conviction, confirmation and proof that JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD!
- F. “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.” (vv.32-34)
1. Paul received mixed reviews for such a marvelous exposition of the gospel... some mocked, others wanted to hear more, and just a few became believers.
 2. We hear no more about Athens—no church was started there by Paul. Was his ministry in Athens a failure? Obviously not! A few souls were saved (one of whom was the very member of the Areopagus Council), and even if it had been only one, it was worth it all. Moreover, Paul had faithfully delivered the message—the results are always up to God, not us.
 3. Certainly, as already noted, the philosophy and “wisdom” of the Athenians proved to be a great hindrance in their ability to receive the simplicity of the gospel with childlike faith; for most of them, the wisdom of God sounded like

foolishness. How similar our modern culture is to that of the Athenians!

X. PAUL IN CORINTH

Acts 18:1-17: ¹After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.

²There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, ³and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. ⁴Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. ⁵When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. ⁶But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”

⁷Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. ⁸Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized. ⁹One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. ¹⁰For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.” ¹¹So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

¹²While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him into court. ¹³“This man,” they charged, “is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law.” ¹⁴Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to the Jews, “If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you. ¹⁵But 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.” ¹⁶So he had them ejected from the court. ¹⁷Then they all turned on Sosthenes the synagogue ruler and beat him in front of the court. But Gallio showed no concern whatever.

A. “After this, Paul left Athens and went to **Corinth**. (v.1)

1. Corinth was a major city, and at the time, the chief city of Greece, both commercially and politically.

2. One of the main temples in Corinth was the one dedicated to Aphrodite, the goddess of love; because of that, prostitution and immorality were rampant in the city. Corinth's sexual depravity was so widely known that the Greek verb "to Corinthianize" came to be synonymous with "practicing sexual immorality."
 3. Paul was no doubt led to Corinth by the Holy Spirit, for in such a debased culture the gospel must be preached and a church established!
- B. Paul formed an important friendship with **Aquila and Priscilla**, one which was to continue for the rest of his life (see Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19); they were all tentmakers by trade, so Paul stayed and worked with them. (vv.2-3)
1. It is not clear from the Scriptures whether Aquila and Priscilla were already Christians when Paul met them, or whether they were saved through Paul's ministry.
 2. Paul later explained to the Corinthian church that, although as a full-time apostle, he had every right to receive financial support from the churches, as a matter of policy, he chose not to use that right, working rather to support himself and supply his own needs (1 Cor. 9:3-18);
 3. He frequently made mention of his manual labor in his epistles, explaining that he did not want to be a financial burden to the churches and wanted to set an example for others (Acts 20:34; 2 Cor. 11:7; 1 Thess. 2:9; 3:8).
- C. "Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ." (vv.4-5)
1. As was his custom, Paul went first to the synagogue to preach to the Jews and Greek converts.
 2. Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia; Paul had requested both of them to join him in Athens, which they evidently did (1 Thess. 3:1-3); but they may have been sent back to Macedonia almost immediately to help the

churches there—Timothy to Thessalonica, and Silas perhaps to Philippi.

3. “Paul devoted himself [lit. “was pressed or compelled by the Spirit” – KJV, NKJV] exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.” – this may suggest that the burden Paul felt was so great that he stopped making tents, giving his full time and attention to the gospel ministry.
- D. “But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he **shook out his clothes in protest** and said to them, ‘Your blood be on your own heads! **I am clear of my responsibility**. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’ Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.” (vv.6-8)
1. The Jews once again were Paul’s number one opponents—they “resisted and blasphemed” (NAS);
 2. Similar to his shaking the dust from his feet in protest to the Jews in Pisidian Antioch (who had resisted him), and turning to the Gentiles with the good news (Acts 13:46-51), Paul dissociated himself with the Corinthian Jews and cleared himself of any further responsibility for their souls.
 3. “**I am clear of my responsibility**.” Paul’s words are a solemn reminder to every believer that there is such a thing as *blood-guiltiness*. The Christian is a debtor to all men, and if he fails to discharge that debt by proclaiming the gospel, God will hold him responsible. If, on the other hand, he faithfully shares Christ and meets with stubborn refusal, then he himself is cleared of guilt, and the responsibility rests with the Christ-rejecter. Consider the following:
 - a) **Ezek. 3:17-19:** ¹⁷*Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from Me.* ¹⁸*When I say to a wicked man, “You will surely die,” and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die*

for his sin, and **I will hold you accountable for his blood.** ¹⁹But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself.

- b) **1 Cor. 9:16:** Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. **Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!**
 - c) **Acts 20:20-21, 26-27:** ²⁰You know that **I have not hesitated to preach anything** that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. ²¹I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus... ²⁶Therefore, I declare to you today that **I am innocent of the blood of all men.** ²⁷**For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.**
4. After breaking away from the Jewish synagogue, Paul had the joy of seeing Crispus, the synagogue ruler, along with his entire household, come to faith in Christ (whom Paul himself baptized – see 1 Cor. 1:14-16); and many other Corinthians (Gentiles) received the word, believed and were baptized.
- E. “One night the **Lord spoke to Paul in a vision:** ‘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.’ So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.” (vv.9-11)
- 1. The Lord spoke to Paul in a vision.
 - a) Paul had seen the Lord Jesus in His resurrected body at his conversion (Acts 9:4-6; 1 Cor. 15:8);
 - b) He would later see Him in a trance while praying in the temple at Jerusalem (Acts 22:17-18);
 - c) Here he sees Him in a vision.
 - 2. What gracious assurance God gave the apostle: *Don't be afraid, no one is going to hurt you; keep on speaking, for I am with you; I have many people in this city!*

3. **“I have many people in this city.”**

- a) They belonged to the Lord in the sense that He had already marked them; He was working in their lives, and they would ultimately be saved.
- b) Jesus said that souls first belong to the Father, and He then gives them to the Son in order that they may hear His word and be saved:

John 17:2, 6: ²*For You granted Him authority over all people that He might give eternal life to all those You have given Him... ⁶I have revealed You to those whom You gave Me out of the world. They were Yours; You gave them to Me and they have obeyed Your word.*

4. The Lord’s words so encouraged Paul that he stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God (much can be learned about this period from 1 and 2 Corinthians).

F. Toward the end of Paul’s stay in Corinth, the Jews again stirred up trouble, bringing false charges and questions about the Jewish law against him in court; however, Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, threw out the case, so the angry Jews all turned on Sosthenes the synagogue ruler and beat him, but Gallio showed no concern whatever. (vv.12-17)

1. Paul’s own people, the Jews, continued to be his biggest thorn in the side!
2. Sosthenes is included in Paul’s opening salutation to the Corinthians as “our brother” (1 Cor. 1:1), perhaps explaining why the Jews had beaten him—obviously he had become a follower of Paul and a believer in Jesus Christ!

XI. PAUL RETURNS TO ANTIOCH

Acts 18:18-22: ¹⁸*Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken. ¹⁹They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. ²⁰When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. ²¹But as he left, he promised, “I will*

come back if it is God's will." Then he set sail from Ephesus.

²²*When he landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch.*

- A. "Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, **he had his hair cut off** at Cenchrea **because of a vow** he had taken." (v.18)
 - 1. Paul finally departed from Corinth with Priscilla and Aquila, sailing for Syria, his objective being to return to Antioch.
 - 2. Commentators are divided over the cutting off of hair because of a vow:
 - a) Many believe that Paul had taken a temporary Nazirite vow (see Num. 6:1-21) to express thanks to God for His deliverance or protection, the end of which was marked with the shaving of the head;
 - b) Others believe that the reference is to Aquila (himself a Jew – see Acts 18:2) who had his hair cut off, since the manner of the vow was strongly Jewish, and not fitting for a man of Paul's spiritual maturity;
 - c) The text is such that either could be the case, and we will probably never know for sure which interpretation is correct.
- B. Paul made a brief stop in **Ephesus**, leaving Aquila and Priscilla there; he reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue, who wanted him to stay longer, but he declined, promising to return, God willing. (vv.19-21)
- C. Sailing from Ephesus, Paul landed at Caesarea, greeted the church, and then went down to **Antioch**. (v.22)
 - 1. This would be Paul's final visit to Antioch.
 - 2. He would spend "some time" there before departing on his third missionary journey.

XII. CONCLUSION

- A. On Paul's 2nd missionary journey, Silas and Timothy were Paul's primary co-laborers in the ongoing gospel outreach.

- B. In city after city, Paul and his companions encountered resistance from the Jews which resulted in riots, lynching, and imprisonment.
- C. Important churches were established whose names are familiar from Paul's epistles in the New Testament: Corinthians, Philippians and Thessalonians.
- D. One interesting exception was the city of Athens. The city was so dominated by religious idolatry and human philosophy that only a few were able to receive the good news of Jesus Christ. **NO CHURCH WAS ESTABLISHED IN ATHENS!** Athens is never again mentioned in Scripture after Paul's visit there. And herein lies a strong indictment against our modern Western culture: We, like the Athenians, are very religious; but it is often not true religion, i.e. sincere faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—it is a *potpourri* of secular humanism, atheistic philosophies, false religions and idolatry. If we don't humble ourselves and repent, the gospel of Jesus Christ may end up sounding like so much "babbling" and foolishness to the people here just as it did to the Athenians.
- E. After completing his trip, Paul returned to Antioch, from whence he would eventually embark on his 3rd and final missionary journey before his arrest, trials and voyage to Rome.

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Part 10 – Paul’s 3rd Missionary Journey

(18:23-21:16)

(No. 1119.10 – - NLC)

I. PAUL LEAVES ANTIOCH & APOLLOS IN EPHESUS

Acts 18:23-28: ²³After 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.

²⁴Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. ²⁵He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶He 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 God more adequately.

²⁷When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, 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. ²⁸For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

A. “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.” (v.23)

1. After Paul’s departure from Antioch, the first leg of his 3rd missionary journey was similar to that of his 2nd journey, likely passing through Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch—cities where there were established churches—to strengthen the disciples in those places.
2. There is no indication that Paul carried out pioneer evangelism in these cities, but simply offered encouragement to old friends and converts; neither is there any record of opposition or hindrance as he had experienced on previous missions.

B. “Meanwhile a Jew named **Apollos**, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. 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 God more adequately.” (vv.24-26)

1. After Paul left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus on his first hasty visit there, God in His sovereign providence had brought another key person to Ephesus—Apollos.
2. **Apollos** would prove to be an important co-laborer with Paul, particularly in Corinth; a brief résumé or bio is given:
 - a) He was Jew and native of Alexandria, Egypt—the place where the OT had been translated into Greek; the second most important city in the Roman empire;
 - b) He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the OT Scriptures;
 - c) He had been instructed in the way of the Lord;
 - d) He spoke boldly and with great fervor, teaching about Jesus accurately and proving He was the Christ from the Scriptures.
3. Because Apollos only knew the baptism of John, **Priscilla and Aquila** invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.
 - a) The details of what Priscilla and Aquila explained to Apollos are not given; presumably, Apollos only knew of Christ’s ministry up to John’s baptism of repentance—he had not heard of baptism in the name of Jesus or the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38-39); in Acts 19:1-7, Paul met some disciples in Ephesus in a similar spiritual condition (who may possibly have been taught by Apollos while he was still in this earlier state of partial understanding).
 - b) How beautiful to see the humble character of Apollos—though very knowledgeable in the OT Scriptures, he was also very teachable and open to further instruction from tentmakers—Priscilla and Aquila!

- c) NOTE: Although Priscilla and Aquila had their secular business of tent making, they were also very busy in the Lord's work in Ephesus; Paul had obviously trained them well during the time they had spent together.
- C. "When Apollos wanted to go to **Achaia**, 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. For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ." (vv.27-28)
1. Achaia – the Roman province whose capital was Corinth;
 2. Apollos was a great help in **Corinth**, where he seemed to center his efforts; Paul refers to him frequently in his epistle to the Corinthians, where it is clear that he was recognized as an important leader in the church:
 - a) **1 Cor. 1:12:** *What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow **Paul**"; another, "I follow **Apollos**"; another, "I follow **Cephas**"; still another, "I follow Christ."*
 - b) **1 Cor. 3:4-6, 22:** *⁴For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men? ⁵What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. ⁶I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow... ²²whether **Paul or Apollos or Cephas** or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours...*
 - c) **1 Cor. 4:6:** *Now, brothers, I have applied these things to **myself and Apollos** for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written." Then you will not take pride in one man over against another.*
 - d) **1 Cor. 16:12:** *Now about our brother **Apollos**: I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers. He was quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity.*

3. “Those who **by grace had believed**” (v.27) – This is a profound statement often overlooked by Bible scholars: man’s ability to *believe* in Christ is the result of the mysterious workings of God’s *grace* in his heart! Even the faith to believe is not our own—it is the generous, gracious gift of God!
 - a) **Eph. 2:8-9:** *⁸For it is **by grace** you have been saved, through **faith**—and **this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God**—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast.*
 - b) **Rom. 12:3:** *For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with **the measure of faith God has given you.***
 - c) Please refer to *Section III.D* of Part 8 on pp.141-149 for a lengthy discussion of the mysterious cooperation of divine election by grace and human responsibility in the process of salvation.
4. Apollos vigorously convinced the Jews in **public debate**, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. (v.28)

II. PAUL IN EPHESUS

Acts 19:1-12: *¹While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples ²and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” ³So Paul asked, “Then what baptism did you receive?” “John’s baptism,” they replied. ⁴Paul 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.” ⁵On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. ⁷There were about twelve men in all.*

⁸Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. ⁹But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. ¹⁰This

went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

¹¹God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, ¹²so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.

A. “While Apollos was at Corinth, **Paul** took the road through the interior and arrived **at Ephesus**. There he found some disciples and asked them, ‘**Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?**’ They answered, ‘**No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.**’ So Paul asked, ‘Then what baptism did you receive?’ ‘John’s baptism,’ they replied. 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.” (vv.1-7)

1. “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” – This was obviously an important matter to Paul (and should be to any Christian minister). What prompted his question is unknown, but he apparently discerned something was lacking in their Christian experience.
2. Like Apollos, they had only heard of John’s baptism (as suggested earlier, it is not unreasonable to think that these disciples might have been taught by Apollos before Priscilla and Aquila explained to him the way of God more perfectly).
3. Following the pattern given in Acts 2:38-39, Paul baptized them in the name of the Lord Jesus and prayed for them to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit.
4. They spoke in tongues and prophesied [see Mark 16:15; Acts 2:4; 10:46 and *Section I.E* of Part 3 on pp.23-26].
5. NOTE: Here, as in Acts 8:12-17 and Acts 10:44-48, the baptism in the Holy Spirit was an experience *separate* and *distinct* from new birth or water baptism; contrary to what *most* commentators say, the Holy Spirit is NOT received automatically at the time of salvation—it is a subsequent and discrete act that follows thereafter.

B. “Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the **lecture hall of Tyrannus**. This went on **for two years**, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.” (vv.8-10)

1. Three months in the synagogue, followed by two years in the hall of Tyrannus, gives us a clear timeline of Paul’s extended visit in Ephesus; Paul later referred to his **three years in Ephesus** (Acts 20:31)—not a contradiction, for by Jewish reckoning, any part of a year was considered a year. This is the longest stay in one city that Luke records in Acts.
2. Paul followed the same customary approach in Ephesus: Jews first, then Greeks; when the Jews became obstinate and refused to believe, they stirred up trouble once again.
3. The Jews “publicly **maligned** the Way”
 - a) They spread evil rumors before the congregation, reviling and cursing the Christian Way.
 - b) “The Way” – a term commonly used to refer to the early Church movement [see Acts 9:2; 19:23; 22:4; 24:14, 22; and *Section V.C.3* of Part 6 on p.95].
4. Paul left the synagogue, and began having daily meetings for the next two years in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This was probably a school used by the philosopher Tyrannus; he would have given his classes in the cooler morning hours. One Greek manuscript records that Paul did his instruction from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., the hot time of the day, but a time when the hall would have been available and people were not at their regular work.
5. NOTE: Throughout the book of Acts, the **apostles and believers met together wherever possible**:
 - a) In **rented rooms** or in other **people’s houses** (Acts 1:13; 2:46; 4:23; 5:42; 10:23-48; 12:12-17; 18:7; 20:7-9; 28:30-31);
 - b) In **temples or synagogues** (Acts 2:46; 5:12, 42; 13:5, 14; 14:1; 17:1-3, 10, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8);

- c) In **schools** (Acts 19:9-10);
 - d) In the **open air**, the **streets** or the **marketplace** (Acts 14:8-20; 16:13-16; 17:17);
 - e) Unlike many modern churches, there is NO MENTION in the 28 chapters of Acts of a single church buying properties, lands or buildings (just selling them! – Acts 2:45; 4:34-37); there is NO MENTION of building funds or programs! It simply was not their main focus. Perhaps we've got it all wrong!
6. “All the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.” (v.10)
- a) Paul's extended stay of two years and three months paid huge dividends—all who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of God!
 - b) An important element of Paul's apostolic strategy is observed here: Many of the cities where he planted churches were strategic centers that, when evangelized, served as focal points from which the gospel could radiate out to the surrounding areas;
 - c) Others examples are: Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:14), Thessalonica (Acts 17:1), and Corinth (Acts 18:1).
- C. “God did **extraordinary miracles** through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.” (vv.11-12)
1. NOTE: There is no record of a miracle being wrought by the hands of Paul since the casting out of the spirit of divination from the slave girl in Philippi (Acts 16:16-18); this is not to say there were no miracles in Athens, Thessalonica or Berea, although it is conceivable that Paul's preaching was with such power that no other miracles were needed.
 2. However, Paul confirms in his epistle to the Corinthians that many miracles were indeed done in Corinth; there, he speaks about signs, wonders and miracles as being “marks” or signs of a true apostle:

2 Cor. 12:11-12: ¹¹*I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the “super-apostles,” even though I am nothing.* ¹²*The things that mark an apostle— signs, wonders and miracles—were done among you with great perseverance.*

3. The closest parallel to healing and deliverance taking place through a cloth in Christ’s ministry was when people touched His cloak (Mark 5:27-34; 6:56).
4. Similar extraordinary, unusual signs accompanied the ministry of the apostle Peter when the sick were healed by his shadow and the dead were raised (Acts 5:1-16; 9:36-42).

III. THE SONS OF SCEVA

Acts 19:13-20: ¹³*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.”* ¹⁴*Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this.* ¹⁵*One day the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?”* ¹⁶*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.*

¹⁷*When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor.* ¹⁸*Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds.* ¹⁹*A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas.* ²⁰*In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.*

- A. “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.’ **Seven sons of Sceva**, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. One day the evil spirit answered them, ‘**Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are 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.” (vv.13-16)

1. Here again, we note that whenever God moves in power, Satan is invariably on hand to obstruct and oppose; examples that we have already encountered in Acts are the following:
 - a) Simon the sorcerer wanted to imitate Peter and John (Acts 8:9-24);
 - b) The false prophet Bar-Jesus opposed Paul, and tried to turn Sergius Paulus from the faith;
2. Now, drawn by Paul’s ability to cast out demons by cloths he had touched, Jewish exorcists tried to copy his work.
3. Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, had previously been going around driving out evil spirits; that certain of the Jews actually had the power to expel demons was acknowledged by the Lord Jesus:

Luke 11:18-20: ¹⁸*If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebul.* ¹⁹*Now if I **drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your followers drive them out?** So then, they will be your judges.* ²⁰*But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.*

4. But they tried using the name of the Lord Jesus as a magic charm to cast demons out of those who were possessed, saying, “In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.”
5. One day the evil spirit answered them (demons often answered back to Jesus), “Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?”
 - a) It is obvious that all demons know who Jesus is;
 - b) This demon had heard about Paul—he knew who he was—what a compliment! He knew Paul had power and authority because he was a genuine follower of Jesus Christ. And here is a logical question: Do the devils know who *you* are or who *I* am? Have they

heard about our preaching, holy living, anointing and power? Are they afraid of *us*?

- c) The evil spirit didn't know who these sons of Sceva were!
6. "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)
- a) It is significant to note that the *evil spirit* spoke through the demon-possessed man in v.15, but it was the *man* who stripped the would-be exorcists and beat them up!
 - b) The fact that this one demoniac was able to overpower seven men confirms accounts in other passages of Scripture that indicate how evil spirits are able to give extraordinary strength to those possessed:
Mark 5:1-4: ¹*They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes.* ²*When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet Him.* ³*This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain.* ⁴*For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him.*
 - c) This story is a sober warning to all those who name the name of Christ, but do not depart from iniquity. If we resist the devil by a sincere, living faith in Christ, he will flee from us; but if we think we can merely use the name of Jesus like some lucky charm, the enemy *will* prevail against us.
- B. "When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, **they were all seized with fear**, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. Many of those who believed now came and **openly confessed their evil deeds**. A number who had practiced sorcery **brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly**. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. (vv.17-20)
1. God has strange ways of furthering His cause! The news of the exorcists' encounter with the evil spirit caused a deep

sense of awe and fear to fall on the people, just as it had happened in Jerusalem after Ananias and Sapphira fell down dead in the church (Acts 5:1-11).

2. The people realized that the things of God and the name of Jesus are not to be trifled with, nor should they be mixed with false religions or pagan practices and superstitions; they got serious about their Christian life, and started doing some serious house-cleaning!
3. The name of the Lord Jesus (not Paul!) was held in high honor [lit. “magnified”].
4. The Spirit of God worked so mightily among those who had practiced various forms of magical arts that a great number turned to Christ, confessing and exposing their evil practices; they even made a public demonstration of their faith by gathering up their books of magic and sorcery and burning them in a great bonfire (valued at approximately \$10,000 in modern currency).
5. It is well documented from history that Ephesus had a reputation for being a center of magical practice. According to magical theory, the potency of a spell was bound up with its secrecy; so if it were to be divulged, it would be rendered ineffective. So these converted sorcerers and magicians renounced their dark powers by rendering their spells inoperative.
6. A number of such magical scrolls have survived to our day and can be seen in museum collections in London, Paris, and Leiden.
7. There are some important lessons to learn from this account of the Ephesian believers:
 - a) They demonstrated what John the Baptist had called “fruits of repentance” (Luke 3:8-14)—outward acts resulting from deep conviction and repentance in their hearts;
 - b) The devil operates in darkness and secrecy, so confession and public exposure of hidden sin brings light and renders the devil powerless; Paul & John explained this in depth in their epistles:

Eph. 5:6-15: *Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes*

on those who are disobedient. ⁷Therefore do not be partners with them. ⁸For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹(for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) ¹⁰and find out what pleases the Lord. ¹¹**Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.** ¹²For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do **in secret.** ¹³But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴for it is **light that makes everything visible.** This is why it is said: “Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” ¹⁵Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise...

1 John 1:5-9: ⁵This is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. ⁷But **if we walk in the light**, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin. ⁸If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹**If we confess our sins**, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

- c) One of the titles given to Satan is *Beelzebub*, meaning “lord of flies” or “dung god” (Luke 11:15-19); in the context, the imagery is quite revealing. Demons are likened to flies (that are attracted to dung, filth and garbage), and the devil is lord over them. If one wants to get rid of flies, the remedy is quite simple: get rid of the garbage! Jesus was able to say that Satan had no place in Him, no claim on Him, and nothing in Him that belonged to the devil:

John 14:30 (AMP): *I will not talk with you much more, for the prince (evil genius, ruler) of the world is coming. And he has no claim on Me. [He has nothing in common with Me; there is **nothing in Me that belongs to him**, and he has no power over Me.]*

- d) The Ephesians understood this principle: *We don't want any demons jumping on us like the sons of Sceva,*

so we're going to clean house and get rid of anything that might attract evil spirits! By no coincidence, Paul later wrote these words to the Ephesians in his epistle:

Eph. 4:27 (AMP): *Leave no [such] room or foothold for the devil [give no opportunity to him].*

- e) Likewise, when we turn to Christ in true repentance, we should be careful to get rid of any objects/items (books, music, photos, movies, art, statues, charms, idols, etc.) from our past, sinful life that might have connections with demonic spirits.
8. “In this way the **word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.**” (v.20)
- a) At this point, Luke gives another one of his gospel “progress reports” [see *Section I.H.1* of Part 5 on p.72].
 - b) Perhaps if modern Christians would clean their houses and burn all the idols, trashy books, magazines, CDs and DVDs, then the word of God would prevail much more!

IV. A RIOT AT EPHESUS

Acts 19:21-41: 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.”* ²²*He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer.*

²³*About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way.*

²⁴*A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen.* ²⁵*He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said: “Men, you know we receive a good income from this business.*

²⁶*And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all.* ²⁷*There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.”*

²⁸When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” ²⁹Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul’s traveling companions from Macedonia, and rushed as one man into the theater. ³⁰Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. ³¹Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater.

³²The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. ³³The Jews pushed Alexander to the front, and some of the crowd shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. ³⁴But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

³⁵The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: “Men of Ephesus, doesn’t all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? ³⁶Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to be quiet and not do anything rash. ³⁷You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. ³⁸If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. ³⁹If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. ⁴⁰As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of today’s events. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it.” ⁴¹After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

A. “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.’ He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer.” (vv.21-22)

1. As Paul’s time in Ephesus drew to a close, he made preparations to visit Jerusalem via Macedonia and Achaia, and ultimately, Rome.
2. Paul’s 2½ years in Ephesus had been extremely fruitful, and many lives had been transformed through the power of the gospel. Up until this time, not much is recorded in Acts

about persecutions and troubles in Ephesus, but that was about to change. And Paul made several references in his letters to the Corinthians (which was likely written during his stay in Ephesus) about great personal hardships and dangers he faced in Ephesus:

- a) **1 Cor. 15:32:** *If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”*
- b) **2 Cor. 1:8-10:** ⁸*We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the **hardships we suffered in the province of Asia**. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we **despaired even of life**. ⁹*Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death*. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. ¹⁰*He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and He will deliver us. On Him we have set our hope that He will continue to deliver us...**
- c) **2 Cor. 11:23:** *Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, **been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again**. [NOTE: Some believe that Paul was imprisoned several times while in Ephesus, though Luke makes no mention of it in Acts.]*

B. “About that time there **arose a great disturbance about the Way**. A silversmith named Demetrius, who **made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business** for the craftsmen. He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said: ‘Men, you know **we receive a good income from this business**. And you see and hear how this fellow **Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people** here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. **He says that man-made gods are no gods at all**. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped

throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.” (vv.23-27)

1. Verses 23-41 describe a “great disturbance [lit. “tumult, commotion, stir”] **about the Way**” – the riot that ensued was caused by the collision of light and darkness, truth and error, idolatry and the living God—*the Way!*
 2. The temple of Artemis (the Greek name for the Roman goddess Diana), one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, was in Ephesus; Artemis was revered as the mother goddess of fertility, and a whole cult of prostitution and immoral practices was an integral part of her worship.
 3. Paul’s ministry had a profound effect on Ephesus, with many turning from their idols to the Lord; he had persuaded (“led astray!”) the people that their man-made gods were no gods at all. The spiritual awakening in the city was so widespread that it caused a business recession among the idol-makers.
 4. Demetrius, a leader and spokesman of the silversmiths (whose primary source of income was making silver shrines of Artemis: “it brought in no little business”), gathered together all his fellow craftsmen and sought to stir them up to take some definite action.
 5. Demetrius revealed his true motive when he said that their “good income” was in danger, but he sought to give it a religious coloring by pretending great reverence for Artemis and her temple: “the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.”
 6. Behold once again the “root of all evil... the love of money!” (1 Tim. 6:10). How similar to the anger of the owners of the slave girl whom Paul delivered from a demon of divination when they “realized their hope of making money was gone” [see Acts 16:16-19 and *Section IV.C* of Part 9 on p.190].
- C. “When they heard this, they were **furious** and began **shouting: ‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!’** Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul’s traveling companions from Macedonia, and rushed as one man

into the theater. Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater. **The assembly was in confusion:** Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. The Jews pushed Alexander to the front, and some of the crowd shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. But when they realized he was a Jew, they all **shouted in unison for about two hours: ‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!’**” (vv.28-34)

1. Having heard that their income was in jeopardy, the silversmiths were “furious” [lit. “full of wrath, fierceness, and indignation, as if breathing hard”] and started a riot that turned into a mob scene in which the whole city became involved.
2. The entire crowd shouted in unison for two hours: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”
 - a) Here our attention is drawn to the zeal and passion with which people will worship false gods—often cutting themselves, sacrificing children, and expending great energies to please their idols!
 - b) They praised their god for two straight hours! That is impressive! How rare that modern Christians should spend more than a half an hour in a church worship service singing, praising God, and declaring His greatness. Inevitably, after 30 minutes, some begin to fidget, look at their watches, and openly display their consternation at the length of the praise service. Perhaps we need to remember the Ephesians: for TWO HOURS they never tired of declaring the greatness of a god that is NO GOD!
3. The whole crowd was in a state of confusion—most of them didn’t even know why there were there! How often we witness this in our modern-day protests and rallies, where most of the people shouting, chanting, carting signs and posters, don’t have a clue why they are there. Of one thing we can be sure: God was NOT at work in this riot, for He is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33).

D. “The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: ‘Men of Ephesus, doesn’t all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to be quiet and not do anything rash. You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of today’s events. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it.’ After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.” (vv.35-41)

1. The city clerk finally calmed the mob, assuring them that Artemis and her temple remained intact and that Ephesus would continue to be the guardian of her great temple.
2. He reasoned with the silversmiths that if they had a grievance against Paul, they should settle it legally in the courts. Finally, the crowd dispersed.

V. PAUL IN MACEDONIA AND GREECE

Acts 20:1-6: ¹When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said good-bye and set out for Macedonia. ²He traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece, ³where he stayed three months. Because the Jews made a plot against him just as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia. ⁴He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy also, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia. ⁵These men went on ahead and waited for us at Troas. ⁶But we sailed from Philippi after the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and five days later joined the others at Troas, where we stayed seven days.

- A. Various travels of Paul throughout Macedonia and Greece are mentioned, along with some notable co-workers who accompanied him.

- B. “These men went on ahead and waited for us... But we sailed from Philippi...” (vv.5-6)
1. At this point, the “we/us” passages resume (and continue until Acts 21:18, restarting finally from Acts 27:1 – 28:16), indicating that Luke had again joined Paul in his journey (the “we” passages first occurred in Acts 16:10 – 17).
 2. Apparently, Paul sent the other seven brethren mentioned on ahead to Troas, while he and Luke visited Philippi. After the Days of Unleavened Bread, or the Passover, Paul and Luke sailed from Macedonia to join the others in Troas.

VI. EUTYCHUS RAISED FROM THE DEAD AT TROAS

Acts 20:7-12: ⁷*On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. ⁸There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. ⁹Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead. ¹⁰Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “He’s alive!” ¹¹Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left. ¹²The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted.*

- A. “On the **first day of the week** we came together to break bread.” (v.7)
1. This is the earliest text from which it has been reasonably inferred that believers in the early Church met together for worship on **Sunday**, the first day of the week.
 2. Presumably in celebration and remembrance of Christ’s resurrection, which occurred on the first day of the week (Mat. 28:1; Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1), Sunday became known as “**the Lord’s Day**” (Rev. 1:10), the day on which Christians would gather for corporate worship.
 3. Paul taught the churches about collections and offerings on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

4. The breaking of bread refers specifically to the Lord's Supper, commanded by Jesus in Luke 22:19 and observed by the earliest Christians (Acts 2:42); Paul gave further instructions concerning this ordinance in his epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 10:16-17; 11:17-34).
- B. Paul talked on and on past midnight, obviously having many important things to share with the believers there in Troas before leaving the next day (vv.7, 9).
 - C. **Eutychus**, a young man seated in a third-story window during Paul's address, was overcome with sleep and **fell to his death**. Paul went down, threw himself on the young man, wrapped his arms around him, and he was **brought back to life** (vv.8-10)
 1. Eutychus was "picked up dead" (v.9), an observation which Luke, being a physician, would himself have most certainly verified.
 2. Luke's description of Paul throwing himself on the young man's body is similar to that of Elijah and Elisha raising the dead (1 Kings 17:21; 2 Kings 4:34-35), confirming that his intention in giving this account was to show that a miracle had taken place.
 - D. "'Don't be alarmed,' he [Paul] said. 'He's alive!' Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left. The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted." (vv.10-12)
 1. Further indication that this young man had died and had been miraculously brought back to life again;
 2. Paul continued preaching until morning!

VII. PAUL'S FAREWELL TO THE EPHESIAN ELDERS

Acts 20:13-38: ¹³*We went on ahead to the ship and sailed for Assos, where we were going to take Paul aboard. He had made this arrangement because he was going there on foot.* ¹⁴*When he met us at Assos, we took him aboard and went on to Mitylene.* ¹⁵*The next day we set sail from there and arrived off Kios. The day after that we crossed over to Samos, and on the following day arrived at Miletus.* ¹⁶*Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in the province of Asia, for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost.*

¹⁷From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church.

¹⁸When they arrived, he said to them: “You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. ¹⁹I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. ²⁰You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. ²¹I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

²²“And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. ²³I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. ²⁴However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.

²⁵“Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. ²⁶Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. ²⁷For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. ²⁸Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood. ²⁹I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. ³⁰Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. ³¹So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

³²“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. ³³I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. ³⁵In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

³⁶When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed.

³⁷They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. ³⁸What

grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.

- A. Intentionally bypassing Ephesus because he was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost, Paul and his companions sailed to **Miletus**, a city on the coast about 35 miles south of Ephesus. (vv.13-16)
- B. “From Miletus, **Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church**. When they arrived, he said to them: ‘**You know how I lived the whole time I was with you**, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.’” (vv.17-21)
 - 1. Known as Paul’s farewell address to the Ephesian elders, verses 17-35 give us some amazing insights into the heart and life of this great man of God. The address also highlights the importance of church leaders and leadership.
 - 2. Paul called for the “**elders**” [Gk. *presbuteros* = “seniors, elders”], whom he later calls “**overseers**” [Gk. *episkopos* = “bishop, superintendent, officer in general charge of the church”] and “**shepherds**” [Gk. *poimaino* = “to feed, tend or rule as a shepherd or supervisor”] in v.28; contrary to distinctions made in modern Christian circles, Paul used the terms elder, pastor, bishop and overseer interchangeably—they are synonymous biblical titles.
 - 3. Paul made reference, first and foremost, to his manner of life, service, humility, tears, tests and trials and then to his preaching.
 - a) Service, humility, tears, tests and trials—this is the stuff of true gospel ministry—NOT fame, power, success, popularity, money, limelight, or a host of other vanities that many a preacher has fallen prey to!
 - b) “You know how I lived the whole time I was with you.” – Paul’s life *was* his message (1 Thess. 2:1-12; 2 Tim. 3:10-14; Phil. 3:17; 4:9; 1 Cor. 11:1; 2 Cor. 1:12).

- c) Paul’s main message: “Turn to God in **repentance** and have **faith** in our Lord **Jesus**.” How simple!
4. Paul held back nothing in his preaching and teaching that would be helpful to the Ephesians’ spiritual growth and welfare—“**publicly** and from **house to house**.” The apostles’ ministry, like Christ’s, was open and public; it was not something hidden or done in secret, nor did they only preach to big crowds in the synagogues—they were not “above” going house to house with their message:
- a) **John 18:19-21:** ¹⁹*Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about His disciples and His teaching.* ²⁰***“I have spoken openly to the world,”*** Jesus replied. *“I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret.* ²¹*Why question Me? Ask those who heard Me. Surely they know what I said.”*
- b) **Mat. 10:27:** *What I tell you in the dark, **speak in the daylight**; what is whispered in your ear, **proclaim from the roofs**.*
- c) **Acts 18:28:** *For he [Apollos] vigorously refuted the Jews **in public debate**, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ...*
- d) “House to house” (Acts 2:46; 5:42; 10:22; 16:15, 34).
5. “**To both Jews and Greeks...**” – Paul’s ministry was without prejudice or any discrimination based on nationality or religious background—he had no “favorites” or exclusive cliques that he catered to.
- C. ““And now, **compelled by the Spirit**, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the **Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me**. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.”” (vv.22-24)
1. “Compelled” [lit. “bound”] by the Spirit, Paul was going to Jerusalem, not knowing exactly what awaited him there

(although the Holy Spirit had already warned him of prison and hardships that he would face).

- a) Paul's trip to Jerusalem was not against the direction of the Holy Spirit;
 - b) Paul admitted that the Holy Spirit had not revealed to him exactly what would happen to him in Jerusalem (that would occur later through the prophet Agabus); but He had already given Paul a general warning that prison and troubles were coming;
 - c) When the Holy Spirit later spoke through the prophet Agabus (Acts 21:10-14), warning Paul that the Jews in Jerusalem would "bind" [same Greek word used in Acts 20:22] him hand and foot, it was not a prohibition from the Spirit, simply a revelation of the trouble that awaited him there.
2. "However, **I consider my life worth nothing to me**, if only I may **finish the race** and **complete the task** the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace." (v.24)
- a) "However" ["**But none of these things move me**" – KJV] – Paul could not be moved or turned aside from his one goal—to complete what Christ had called him to do;
 - b) This one verse gives us important insights into Paul's mindset and motivation, which can be summarized as follows:
 - (1) Despite persecutions, oppositions, dangers and imprisonments, Paul had already counted the cost of following Christ and had come to one firm decision—he was ready and willing to lay down his life for the Lord in utter self-denial; no sacrifice would be too great for the One who gave His all on the cross;
 - (2) Paul saw himself as a runner in a race, a metaphor he often used in his writings (1 Cor. 9:24-27; 2 Tim. 4:6-8); he understood a powerful truth: it doesn't matter how a runner *starts* a race, only how he *finishes* it!

(3) He kept his eyes fixed on the “task” [Gk. *diakonia* = “ministry, service”] assigned him by the Lord Jesus—to testify to the gospel of God’s grace.

D. “Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. Therefore, I declare to you today that **I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.**” (vv.25-27)

1. Paul gave his final farewell, convinced that he would never see them again. There is some debate whether or not he did actually visit Ephesus again later on after his Roman imprisonment, the last record that Luke gives of Paul’s activities (Acts 28).
2. Paul had served God with a clear conscience, knowing that he had not held back from declaring the whole counsel of God to them; because of that, he was innocent of any *blood-guiltiness* [see *Section X.D.3* of Part 9 on p. 215]—he was blameless because he had done his duty in delivering God’s word, thus clearing himself from any responsibility:

Acts 18:6: *But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”*

E. “**Keep watch over yourselves** and all the flock of which the **Holy Spirit has made you overseers**. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood. I know that after I leave, **savage wolves will come** in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. 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.” (vv.28-32)

1. Paul charges these watchmen to watch over themselves (first) and (then) all the flock; note the order—pay close attention to your own spiritual life, then you will be able to

take care of the church (most ministers get it wrong—they get so busy with the work of the church that they neglect their own life with God and end up in burnout or moral collapse). Consider the following:

- a) **1 Tim. 4:12-16:** ¹²*Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.* ¹³*Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.* ¹⁴*Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.* ¹⁵*Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress.* ¹⁶*Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.*
 - b) **John 17:18-19 (NKJV):** ¹⁸*As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.* ¹⁹*And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.*
 - c) **1 Cor. 9:27 (NKJV):** *But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.*
2. Paul reminded the pastors and elders of Ephesus that they had not chosen themselves for this work, neither had they been elected or appointed by the local congregation—it was the Holy Spirit who “made” [Gk. *tithemi* = “to appoint, ordain, set;” used in 1 Cor. 12:28 “*appointed* apostles...prophets...”] them overseers!
 3. The church they were shepherding is very precious: Christ bought it with His own blood.
 4. Paul gave the shepherds a sober warning to be vigilant and always on the lookout for “savage wolves”—false apostles, prophets, teachers and leaders who would try to infiltrate the church and prey upon the sheep in God’s flock. Paul promised that they would come after his departure; some would even arise from their own number, distorting the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. This was such an imminent danger and heavy burden on Paul’s heart that he reminded the elders how he had been continually

warning them about these things night and day for three years with tears. (vv.29-31)

5. NOTE: If such was the case with one of the most spiritual churches in the New Testament, having a strong apostolic foundation and deep revelation of Christ, are we so naïve to think that our modern churches are not vulnerable to such attacks from the enemy?
6. Paul was leaving, wolves were coming—what could he do? He committed these church leaders to God and to the word of His grace, which could build them up and give them an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. In other words, Paul was entrusting the elders into God’s hands, confident that the inspired Scriptures were totally sufficient to keep them, build them up and equip them for their ministries:

2 Tim. 3:15-17: ¹⁵*How from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.* ¹⁶*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,* ¹⁷*so that **the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.***

- F. **“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. 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 Himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” (vv.33-35)
 1. In closing his message, Paul once again reminded the elders of the example of his own personal life and ministry.
 2. Paul had not used the ministry as a means to financial gain. Quite the contrary! Although, as an apostle, he had a right to receive financial support from the churches, he chose to work when necessary in order to supply his own needs and the needs of his companions.
 3. But he even went beyond that, working as a tentmaker so that he might have the means to help the “weak” [Gk. *astheneo* = “feeble, diseased, sick, impotent”]—the disabled, elderly or others who were incapable of caring for themselves.

4. “Remembering the words the Lord Jesus Himself said: **‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’**” Interestingly enough, these words are not found in any of the Gospels, even though they represent the sum of much of Christ’s teaching.
5. How different Paul’s lifestyle and example from that of many slick radio and TV preachers who prey on unsuspecting souls, making up stories and crying crocodile tears to fleece the flock of their money. Like Balaam, the darkest condemnation and judgment awaits them:

2 Pet. 2:3 (NLT): *In their greed [false prophets] they will make up clever lies to get hold of your money [“make merchandise of you” – KJV]. But God condemned them long ago, and their destruction will not be delayed.*

- G. “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.” (vv.36-38)

VIII. PAUL GOES TO JERUSALEM

Acts 21:1-16: ¹After we had torn ourselves away from them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Cos. The next day we went to Rhodes and from there to Patara. ²We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail. ³After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo. ⁴Finding the disciples there, we stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. ⁵But when our time was up, we left and continued on our way. All the disciples and their wives and children accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray. ⁶After saying good-by to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home.

⁷We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for a day.

⁸Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. ⁹He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.

¹⁰After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

¹²When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

¹⁴When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."

¹⁵After this, we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁶Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and brought us to the home of Mnason, where we were to stay. He was a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples.

A. After we had **torn ourselves away from them...**" (v.1)

1. They had all wept as Paul and the others departed.
2. But here we learn that it was equally emotional for Paul and his companions, who literally felt like they were being "torn away."
3. Behold how they loved one another—how the believers and elders loved Paul, and how he deeply loved the churches!

1 Thess. 2:6-20: ⁶We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, ⁷but **we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children.** ⁸**We loved you so much** that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because **you had become so dear to us.** ⁹Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. ¹⁰You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. ¹¹For you know that **we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children,** ¹²encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into His kingdom and

glory. ¹³And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe...

¹⁷But, brothers, **when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you.** ¹⁸For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan stopped us. ¹⁹For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? ²⁰Indeed, **you are our glory and joy.**

- B. Sailing to Cos, Rhodes, Patara, Phoenicia and Syria, Paul and company finally landed at Tyre. Finding some disciples there, they stayed with them for seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem, but Paul would not be dissuaded, they continued from Tyre on to Ptolemais, where they stayed for one day. (vv.1-7)
1. The first of two warnings not to go to Jerusalem “through the Spirit” came to Paul through the disciples in Tyre.
 2. This raises the question as to whether Paul was deliberately disobedient in going to Jerusalem, whether he unwittingly failed to discern the mind of the Lord, or whether he was actually in the will of God in going. He felt “compelled by the Spirit” to go to Jerusalem (Acts 20:22), so he was obviously not being disobedient to the Spirit. It is not clear if Paul actually recognized that these warnings were given through the Spirit. Paul may have interpreted the advice of his friends as calculated to save him from physical suffering or even death. In his love for his Jewish countrymen, he did not feel that his physical well-being was the important consideration, as he had already stated in Acts 20:24.
- C. “Leaving the next day, **we reached Caesarea** and stayed at the house of **Philip the evangelist**, one of the Seven. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. After we had been there a number of days, a **prophet named Agabus** came down from Judea. Coming over to us, he took Paul’s belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, ‘The Holy Spirit says, “In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and

will hand him over to the Gentiles.”” When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, ‘Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.’ When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, ‘The Lord’s will be done.’ (vv.8-14)

1. They came to Caesarea and stayed with Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven (Acts chs. 6 & 8).
2. His four daughters *prophesied*, not to be confused with the office of a *prophet*, seen in the next verse...
3. Agabus the prophet (first seen in Acts 11:27-30, where he predicted a severe famine in the Roman world), brought the second warning from the Holy Spirit for Paul not to go to Jerusalem; but Paul was resolute, even if it meant prison or death.
4. “When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, ‘**The Lord’s will be done.**’” (v.14)
 - a) This may indicate that they finally recognized that it was the Lord’s will for Paul to go to Jerusalem.
 - b) And the Lord would later affirm Paul’s trip to Jerusalem:

Acts 23:11: *The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about Me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”*

- D. “After this, **we got ready and went up to Jerusalem.** Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and brought us to the home of Mnason, where we were to stay. He was a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples.” (vv.15-16)

IX. CONCLUSION

- A. On his third and final missionary journey, Paul concentrated most of his efforts in Ephesus, spending almost three years establishing the church there. It was a very fruitful investment, and multitudes throughout Asia Minor forsook their idols and turned to the Living God. God used Paul to raise up a large number of elders in the region to carry on his gospel work, and

Paul's farewell address to those elders is a classic worthy of careful study by every pastor and church leader to this day.

- B. Ephesus, like many other places the apostles had visited experienced two things: REVIVAL and RIOTS! Whenever the gospel is preached with power and it is confirmed with signs and wonders, there is a clash between light and darkness. God confirmed the ministry of Paul with extraordinary signs and miracles, so that even cloths that he had touched were taken to the sick and demon-possessed, and they were cured. And as God had used the apostle Peter to raise Dorcas from death to life, He worked mightily through the apostle Paul to raise Eutychus from the dead in Troas.
- C. An important co-laborer named Apollos joined the apostolic team, first meeting Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus and then moving on to Corinth, where he would work closely and extensively with the apostle Paul.
- D. Paul's third apostolic mission ends with his arrival in Jerusalem. Despite numerous warnings about hardships and imprisonments that awaited him in Jerusalem, he could not be dissuaded from going there. The remainder of Acts deals with his arrest, trials and imprisonment in Rome. This will be the topic of study in the next part of our study

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Part 11 – Paul’s Arrest, Trials, & Voyage to Rome (21:17-ch.28)

(No. 1119.11 – - NLC)

I. PAUL’S ARRIVAL AT JERUSALEM

Acts 21:17-26: ¹⁷When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly. ¹⁸The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

²⁰When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: “You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. ²¹They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. ²²What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, ²³so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. ²⁴Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. ²⁵As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.”

²⁶The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.

A. “When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly. The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present.” (vv.17-18)

1. Paul met with the **apostles and elders**, the two groups of church leaders seen throughout the book of Acts.

2. James. This was James the Lord's brother (Mat. 13:55), an apostle and leader in the Jerusalem church (Gal. 1:19; 2:9; Acts 15:13; 21:18); [see *Section X.G* on p.128, Part 7];
- B. "Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. When they heard this, they praised God." (vv.19-20)
1. Paul gave the leaders a detailed account of his ministry (as was the apostles' custom throughout the book of Acts) among the Gentiles;
 2. He reported **what God had done** through him, always acknowledging that it was God, not man, accomplishing these great works.
 3. The Jerusalem leaders rejoiced and praised God when they heard Paul's testimonies.
- C. However, the Jewish brethren were apprehensive and feared trouble in Jerusalem because word had traveled around that Paul had taught "all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs." (vv.20-21) Was this charge accurate? Is this really what Paul had been teaching or not?
1. He did teach that Christ was the end of the law for righteousness to those who believe;
 2. He did teach that once the Christian faith had come, believing Jews were no longer under the law;
 3. He did teach that if a man received circumcision as a means of obtaining justification, then such a man cut himself off from salvation in Christ Jesus;
 4. He did teach that to return to the types and shadows of the law, after Christ had come, was dishonoring to Christ.
 5. In view of this, it is not hard to see why the Jews should think of him as they did.
- D. The brethren in Jerusalem had a scheme which they thought would placate their countrymen, both saved and unsaved; they suggested that Paul should join four other men in a Jewish vow (probably the Nazirite vow: see Num. 6:1-21) to show that he was also living in obedience to the law of Moses (vv.23-24).

- E. “The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.” (v.26)
1. Paul agreed and went along with their plan. Paul’s controversial action in taking part in this Jewish ritual has been defended and criticized.
 2. In Paul’s defense, it has been argued that he was acting according to his own principle to be a Jew to the Jews in order to win them to Christ (1 Cor. 9:19-23).
 3. On the other hand, Paul has been criticized for going too far in his effort to conciliate the Jews, and thus creating the impression that he was under the law. Paul has been charged with being inconsistent with his view that the believer is not under the law, either for justification or as a rule of life (Gal. 1 and 2). From what follows, it could be argued that the whole plan was a resort to carnal reasoning—God didn’t seem too pleased with whole idea.

II. PAUL ARRESTED IN THE TEMPLE

Acts 21:27-36: ²⁷When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, ²⁸shouting, “Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple area and defiled this holy place.” ²⁹(They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple area.)

³⁰The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. ³¹While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. ³²He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

³³The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he asked who he was and what he had done. ³⁴Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another, and since the commander could not get at the truth because of the

uproar, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. ³⁵*When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great he had to be carried by the soldiers.* ³⁶*The crowd that followed kept shouting, “Away with him!”*

A. In any event, the **ploy of the Jerusalem elders did not work.**

Before the seven days of purification were completed, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul in the temple and stirred up trouble—they raised all of the very accusations against Paul that the Jerusalem church leaders had hoped to avoid, even bringing additional charges that he had defiled the temple by bringing Gentiles into the inner courts. (vv.27-30).

1. A riot ensued and the whole city was in an uproar.
2. Paul was dragged from the temple and the gates were shut: the temple doors were shut *physically*, and Luke may even imply, *spiritually*—the temple had ceased to fill its honorable function for the Lord.

B. The mob went wild, violently beating Paul and trying to kill him; Paul’s life was spared only because the Roman soldiers came and arrested him, binding him with two chains and carrying him away to safety in the barracks (vv.31-36).

III. PAUL SPEAKS TO THE CROWD

Acts 21:37 – 22:21: ³⁷*As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander, “May I say something to you?” “Do you speak Greek?” he replied.* ³⁸*“Aren’t you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the desert some time ago?”* ³⁹*Paul answered, “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people.”*

⁴⁰*Having received the commander’s permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic:*

^{22:1}*“Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense.”* ²*When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet. Then Paul said:* ³*“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today.* ⁴*I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison,* ⁵*as*

also the high priest and all the Council can testify. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

⁶“About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. ⁷I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, ‘Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute Me?’ ⁸‘Who are You, Lord?’ I asked. ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,’ He replied. ⁹My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of Him who was speaking to me.

¹⁰‘What shall I do, Lord?’ I asked. ‘Get up,’ the Lord said, ‘and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.’ ¹¹My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

¹²“A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. ¹³He stood beside me and said, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very moment I was able to see him. ¹⁴Then he said: ‘The God of our fathers has chosen you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from His mouth. ¹⁵You will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.

¹⁶And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on His name.’

¹⁷“When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance ¹⁸and saw the Lord speaking. ‘Quick!’ He said to me. ‘Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.’ ¹⁹“‘Lord,’ I replied, ‘these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in You. ²⁰And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.’ ²¹“Then the Lord said to me, ‘Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

A. Just as they were about to take Paul into the barracks, amazingly, Paul asked the officer if he could address the angry crowd. Here we see Paul at his best: bold and fearless! Having received the commander’s permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he began to speak to them in Aramaic (vv.37-40).

- B. Paul very wisely **addressed the Jewish mob in Aramaic** rather than Greek; hearing their mother tongue, they were pleasantly surprised, and their shouts subsided, at least for a short while (vv.1-2)
- C. Paul began explaining his Jewish roots; born in Tarsus, educated in Judaism at the feet of the well-known Jewish teacher, Gamaliel. In his zeal for Judaism, he had persecuted the Christians, filling the prisons with believers in Jesus, to which the high priest and the Sanhedrin could bear witness; from them he had received arrest warrants authorizing him to go to Damascus and bring back Christians from there to Jerusalem to be punished (vv.3-5).
- D. In vv.6-16, Paul shares his own version of the events surrounding **his conversion on the road to Damascus** which are recorded by Luke in Acts 9:1-19 (Paul gives the testimony a second time before King Agrippa in Acts 26); [see *Section V.D* on p.97, Part 6]. In this account, Paul adds **several details not mentioned in Acts 9**:
1. This happened about noon, indicating that the light was more brilliant and glorious than the sun at its height (v.6);
 2. The men travelling with Paul saw the light, and heard the sound of the voice (Acts 9:7), but they could not understand the actual words that were spoken (v.9);
 3. Paul's second question is recorded here, "What shall I do, Lord?" (v.10)
 4. Here we learn that Paul's blindness was caused by the brilliance of the light of Christ's glory that flashed around him (v.11);
 5. Paul supplies more important details about Ananias; he describes him to his Jewish audience as a devout observer of the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews in Damascus. This was important in corroborating the account of Paul's conversion (v.12);
 6. More is learned about what Ananias told Paul: "The God of our fathers has chosen you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from His mouth. You will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be

baptized and wash your sins away, calling on His name.”
(vv.14-16)

- a) Ananias stated that it was the God of our fathers who had ordered the events on the road to Damascus. If the Jews were to oppose and resist what had happened, they were really fighting against God;
- b) Ananias told Paul that he would be a witness for the Lord to all men. This should have prepared the Jewish crowd for Paul’s announcement that he had been sent to the Gentiles;
- c) Paul was told to arise and **be baptized, and wash away his sins, calling on His name.**

E. In vv.17-21, we hear for the first time about an experience Paul had toward the end of his **first visit to Jerusalem**, after his conversion. While praying in the temple, he **fell into a trance** and heard the Lord command him to leave Jerusalem immediately, because the people would not receive his testimony concerning Christ. It was difficult for Paul to comprehend how the Jews, knowing his previous history as a zealous persecutor of the Christians, would refuse to listen to him. But the Lord repeated His command, “Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.”

IV. PAUL THE ROMAN CITIZEN

Acts 22:22-29: ²²*The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, “Rid the earth of him! He’s not fit to live!”* ²³*As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air,* ²⁴*the commander ordered Paul to be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and questioned in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this.* ²⁵*As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, “Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been found guilty?”*

²⁶*When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. “What are you going to do?” he asked. “This man is a Roman citizen.”* ²⁷*The commander went to Paul and asked, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?” “Yes, I am,” he answered.* ²⁸*Then the commander said, “I had to pay a big price for my citizenship.” “But I was born a citizen,” Paul replied.* ²⁹*Those who were about*

to question him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.

- A. Up until this point, the Jews had been listening to Paul quietly. But his mention of going to the Gentiles with the gospel aroused insane jealousy and hatred. Shouting furiously in wild disorder, they cried out for Paul's life (vv.22-23).
- B. When the commander saw the crowd in a mad frenzy, he concluded that Paul must have been guilty of some very serious crime. Apparently, he had not understood Paul's message in Aramaic, so he determined to extract a confession from the apostle by flogging him. As they were about to start flogging Paul, he quietly asked the centurion if it was legal to flog a Roman citizen who hadn't even been found guilty. Actually, it was unlawful even to tie up a Roman citizen before his guilt had been proved! To scourge him was a very serious offense (vv.24-25).
- C. When it became known that Paul was a Roman citizen, the authorities became very afraid and all plans to flog him were suspended (vv.26-29).

V. PAUL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

Acts 22:30 – 23:11: ³⁰*The next day, since the commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them.*

^{23:1}*Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day."*

²*At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. ³Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!" ⁴Those who were standing near Paul said, "You dare to insult God's high priest?" ⁵Paul replied, "Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.'"*

⁶*Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope*

in the resurrection of the dead.”⁷When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.⁸(The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.)

⁹There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. “We find nothing wrong with this man,” they said. “What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?”¹⁰The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks.¹¹The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about Me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”

- A. The commander, still curious to know why Paul had been accused by the Jews, had him released from prison and brought before the chief priests and the Sanhedrin (v.30).
- B. Paul, standing before the Sanhedrin, prefaced his remarks with a statement that throughout his life, he had lived in all good conscience. The **high priest, Ananias**, was infuriated by this statement. He probably viewed Paul as an apostate from the Jewish religion, one who had turned from Judaism to Christianity. Thus, the high priest **ordered that Paul be struck** on the mouth. This was extremely unjust, since the case had barely gotten underway (23:1-2).
- C. Paul snapped back at the high priest, **calling him a whitewashed wall** and saying that God would strike him for violating the law by commanding that Paul be struck unjustly. The attendants were shocked that Paul dared insult God’s high priest in this way (vv.3-4).
- D. Paul replied, “Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: ‘Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.’” (v.5)
 - 1. For some reason, Paul was not aware that Ananias was the high priest;
 - 2. As soon as he realized it, he apologized, quoting Ex. 22:28.

- E. Paul, seeing that there were both Sadducees and Pharisees in the Sanhedrin, astutely decided to divide and conquer, and widen the rift between the two groups; he did this by declaring that he was a Pharisee who was on trial because of his hope in the resurrection of the dead. Paul would have known that the **Sadducees denied the resurrection**, as well as the existence of spirits or angels; and that the **Pharisees, being very orthodox, believed in both**. The plan worked, and such a violent uproar broke out that Paul had to be escorted by the Roman soldiers back to the barracks before he was torn to pieces (vv.6-10).
- F. “The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, ‘Take courage! **As you have testified about Me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.**’” (v.11)
1. Jesus made a personal appearance to Paul in prison;
 2. He affirmed the apostle for being a faithful witness in Jerusalem, assuring him that he would also testify in Rome.

VI. THE PLOT TO KILL PAUL

Acts 23:12-22: ¹²The next morning the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. ¹³More than forty men were involved in this plot. ¹⁴They went to the chief priests and elders and said, “We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul. ¹⁵Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here.”

¹⁶But when the son of Paul’s sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul. ¹⁷Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, “Take this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him.” ¹⁸So he took him to the commander. The centurion said, “Paul, the prisoner, sent for me and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you.”

¹⁹The commander took the young man by the hand, drew him aside and asked, “What is it you want to tell me?” ²⁰He said: “The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul before the Sanhedrin tomorrow on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about him. ²¹Don’t give in to them, because more than forty of them are waiting in ambush for him. They have taken an oath not to eat

or drink until they have killed him. They are ready now, waiting for your consent to their request.” ²²*The commander dismissed the young man and cautioned him, “Don’t tell anyone that you have reported this to me.”*

- A. The next day, more than **forty Jews banded together to kill Paul**, swearing not to eat or drink until they had killed him. They went to the chief priests and elders, suggesting that they bring Paul before the Sanhedrin on the pretext of getting more information about his case. But the forty assassins would be lying in wait to ambush Paul as he was being transported to the council hall (vv.12-15).
- B. In the providence of God, a nephew of Paul overheard the plot and reported it to the apostle. Paul, in turn, reported the matter to one of the centurions, who escorted the nephew to the commander. The nephew then revealed the plot to the commander who decided to take immediate action (vv.16-22).

VII. PAUL SENT TO FELIX THE GOVERNOR

Acts 23:23-35: ²³*Then he called two of his centurions and ordered them, “Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. ²⁴Provide mounts for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix.”*

²⁵*He wrote a letter as follows: ²⁶Claudius Lysias, To His Excellency, Governor Felix:*

Greetings. ²⁷This man was seized by the Jews and they were about to kill him, but I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen. ²⁸I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I brought him to their Sanhedrin. ²⁹I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their law, but there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment. ³⁰When I was informed of a plot to be carried out against the man, I sent him to you at once. I also ordered his accusers to present to you their case against him.

³¹*So the soldiers, carrying out their orders, took Paul with them during the night and brought him as far as Antipatris. ³²The next day they let the cavalry go on with him, while they returned to the barracks. ³³When the cavalry arrived in Caesarea, they delivered*

the letter to the governor and handed Paul over to him. ³⁴The governor read the letter and asked what province he was from. Learning that he was from Cilicia, ³⁵he said, “I will hear your case when your accusers get here.” Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod’s palace.

- A. The commander quickly called for two centurions and arranged for a **military escort to take Paul safely to Governor Felix in Caesarea** under cover of darkness at nine o’clock at night; the guard consisted of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen (vv.23-24).
- B. In a letter to Felix, the commander identified himself as Claudius Lysias, explaining the situation with regard to Paul. Lysias tried to portray himself as a hero and a defender of justice. The commander explained that his investigation showed Paul to be innocent of any charge deserving of death or imprisonment; rather, the tumult seemed to be concerned with questions of Jewish law. Because of a plot against Paul, he felt it advisable to send Paul to Caesarea so that his accusers could come there also, and the whole matter could be aired in Felix’s presence (vv.25-30).
- C. Paul arrived safely in Caesarea the next day, and Felix ordered that he be kept under guard in Herod’s palace until his accusers arrived, and his case could be heard (vv.31-35).

VIII. PAUL’S TRIAL BEFORE FELIX AT CAESAREA

Acts 24:1-21: ¹*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.*

²*When Paul was called in, Tertullus presented his case before Felix: “We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation.*

³*Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude. ⁴But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly.*

⁵*“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 ⁶and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him [and wanted to judge him according to our law.] ⁷[But the commander, Lysias, came and with the use of much force snatched*

him from our hands] ⁸[and ordered his accusers to come before you.] By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him.” ⁹The Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were true.

¹⁰When 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. ¹¹You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. ¹²My 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. ¹³And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. ¹⁴However, 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, ¹⁵and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. ¹⁶So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

¹⁷“After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. ¹⁸I 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. ¹⁹But 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. ²⁰Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin—
²¹unless 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.’”

A. Five days after Paul had left Jerusalem for Caesarea, Ananias the high priest arrived with certain members of the Sanhedrin. They hired a Roman lawyer named Tertullus to prosecute their case; his duty was to stand before Felix and press charges against Paul. Tertullus opened the case for the prosecution by showering the governor with flattery, ingratiating his cause with Felix (vv.1-4).

B. Tertullus proceeded to specify **four distinct charges against Paul** (vv.5-8):

1. He was a troublemaker [lit. “a plague or pest”];

2. He was a creator of revolt, sedition, and riots among all the Jews;
 3. He was a ringleader of the seditious sect of the Nazarenes;
 4. He tried to desecrate or profane the temple.
- C. After Tertullus had expressed confidence in Felix's ability to determine the accuracy of the charges against Paul, the Jews who were present joined in accusation, asserting that all of Tertullus' charges were true (v.9).
- D. Paul, granted permission to respond, answered the charges brought against him, one by one (v.10):
1. As to his being a troublemaker, Paul replied that only twelve days had passed since he went up to Jerusalem, and that his purpose in going was to worship, not to cause a disturbance (v.11);
 2. Next, he denied the charge that he had incited riots among the Jews. At no time, either in the temple, the synagogues or in the city, had he disputed with the people or attempted to stir them up. These were the facts, and no one could disprove them (vv.12-13);
 3. Paul did not deny the third charge, namely, that he was a ringleader of the Nazarenes. He admitted that he worshiped the God of his fathers as a follower of the Way, which they called a sect. He did say that he believed all things which are written in the Old Testament, sharing the expectation of all orthodox Jews, especially the Pharisees, that there would be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. In light of that coming resurrection, he sought to always keep his conscience clear before God and man. Far from stirring the Jews up to insurrection, Paul had come to Jerusalem to bring alms to the Jewish people (vv.14-17).
 4. With regard to the fourth charge, namely, that he had profaned the temple, Paul made this reply: While he was in the act of bringing gifts for the poor and offerings to the temple, in the performance of a Jewish vow, certain Jews from Asia found him and accused him of taking unclean Gentiles into the temple. This, of course, was not true. The apostle was alone at the time, and had been purified from ceremonial defilement. These accusing Jews from Asia

who caused the riot against him in Jerusalem ought to have come to Caesarea to accuse him, if they had anything against him (vv.18-19).

- E. Paul then challenged those Jews who were present to state clearly what crimes he had been proved guilty of when he stood before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. The only charge they could possibly bring against him was for shouting out in their presence: **“It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.”** (vv.20-21)

IX. PAUL KEPT IN CUSTODY

Acts 24:22-27: ²²Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. “When Lysias the commander comes,” he said, “I will decide your case.” ²³He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs.

²⁴Several 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. ²⁵As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, “That’s enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.” ²⁶At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him.

²⁷When 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.

- A. Felix knew enough about the Christian faith to realize that Paul was obviously innocent of any crime against Roman law. But as was always the case, it was a delicate balance these Roman rulers had to keep between Caesar and the Jewish people. Felix faced a serious dilemma—if he were to acquit Paul, he would incur the wrath of the Jews. From a political standpoint, it was important that he should curry their favor. If he condemned Paul, he knew he was violating Roman law. So he adopted an expedient solution to the problem—stall for time. He announced he would wait for Lysias the commander to come to Caesarea; Lysias never had any intention of coming to Caesarea, and there is no historical record that he ever did so.

Thus, Paul was kept under house arrest, similar to what occurred when he was awaiting trial later on in Rome (Acts 28:30-31). Paul was given some freedom so that his friends could visit him and take care of his needs. Obviously the governor did not consider Paul a threat or desperate criminal (vv.22-23).

- B. “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, ‘That’s enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.’” (vv.24-25)
1. Felix and his wife arranged for a private meeting with Paul, apparently to hear more about the Christian faith.
 2. Whether that was the expressed purpose for the meeting or not, Paul took his liberty and boldly spoke to them about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come.
 3. Felix became afraid [“trembled” – KJV], showing that he had some conscience or sincerity; nothing is said about his Jewish wife’s reaction.
 4. But again he decided to stall for time: “**That’s enough for now!** When I find it *convenient*, I will send for you.” It seems Felix was starting to feel the pin pricks of Holy Spirit conviction, but deferred making any decision for Christ. This is very dangerous, for the Scripture warns us that *today* is the day of salvation, and if we hear His voice *today*, we should not harden our hearts (2 Cor. 6:2; Heb. 3:7-8). As far as we know, the convenient time never came for Felix to receive Christ.
- C. However, over the next two years, Felix frequently sent for Paul and talked with him, not about righteousness and judgment, but about money—he was hoping that Paul would pay him a bribe for his release. At the end of the two years, **Felix was replaced by Porcius Festus**; however, as a favor to the Jews, **Felix left Paul in prison**. Historical records indicate that Emperor Nero appointed Festus as governor of Judea in A.D. 60 (vv.26-27).

X. PAUL'S TRIAL BEFORE FESTUS

Acts 25:1-12: ¹Three days after arriving in the province, Festus went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem, ²where the chief priests and Jewish leaders appeared before him and presented the charges against Paul. ³They 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. ⁴Festus answered, "Paul is being held at Caesarea, and I myself am going there soon. ⁵Let some of your leaders come with me and press charges against the man there, if he has done anything wrong."

⁶After spending eight or ten days with them, he went down to Caesarea, and the next day he convened the court and ordered that Paul be brought before him. ⁷When Paul appeared, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many serious charges against him, which they could not prove.

⁸Then Paul made his defense: "I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar."

⁹Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?"

¹⁰Paul answered: "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. ¹¹If, 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!" ¹²After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: "You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!"

A. "Three days after arriving in the province, Festus went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem, 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." (vv.1-3)

1. **Paul had now been in prison in Caesarea for more than two years**, but the Jewish leaders had not forgotten him nor had their jealous hatred for the apostle subsided.

2. It was not justice they were seeking from Festus, just another opportunity to ambush and kill Paul.
- B. But Festus would have been informed of their previous plot to kill Paul, and of the massive military escort needed to transport him safely from Jerusalem to Caesarea. He therefore refused their request, but encouraged them to come to Caesarea and press charges against Paul there, “if he has done anything wrong.” (vv.4-5)
- C. Upon his return to Caesarea, **Festus convened Paul’s trial the very next day**. Paul’s Jewish accusers had come from Jerusalem, bringing many serious charges against him, which they could not prove. Paul, knowing that they had no proof to back up their charges, gave a very simple defense: “I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar.” (vv.6-8)
- D. Festus, trying to curry favor with the Jews, offered Paul the option of going back to Jerusalem to stand trial before the Sanhedrin. Paul knew that to go back to Jerusalem was suicide—he would never reach there alive. He refused, stating that the court in Caesarea was the proper place for his trial. If he had committed a crime against the Roman Empire, he was not unwilling to die for it. But if he was not guilty of such a sin, then on what legal ground could he be handed over to the Jews? Taking full advantage of his rights as a Roman citizen, the apostle then uttered the memorable words, **“I appeal to Caesar.”** (vv.9-11)
1. Was it a mistake for Paul to appeal to Caesar? Was he placing too much dependence on his earthly citizenship, rather than entrusting his fate into the hands of God? It is not clear.
 2. But one thing is certain: Even though his appeal to Caesar hindered his being set free at this time, one way or another, **Paul had to go to Rome**—Jesus had appeared to him in his prison cell in Jerusalem two years earlier, saying, “You must also testify in Rome.” (Acts 23:11)
- E. “After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: ‘You have appealed to Caesar. **To Caesar you will go!**’” (v.12)

XI. FESTUS CONSULTS KING AGRIPPA

Acts 25:13-22: ¹³A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus. ¹⁴Since they were spending many days there, Festus discussed Paul's case with the king. He said: "There is a man here whom Felix left as a prisoner. ¹⁵When I went to Jerusalem, the chief priests and elders of the Jews brought charges against him and asked that he be condemned.

¹⁶"I told them that it is not the Roman custom to hand over any man before he has faced his accusers and has had an opportunity to defend himself against their charges. ¹⁷When they came here with me, I did not delay the case, but convened the court the next day and ordered the man to be brought in. ¹⁸When his accusers got up to speak, they did not charge him with any of the crimes I had expected. ¹⁹Instead, they had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive. ²⁰I was at a loss how to investigate such matters; so I asked if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial there on these charges. ²¹When Paul made his appeal to be held over for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him held until I could send him to Caesar." ²²Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I would like to hear this man myself." He replied, "Tomorrow you will hear him."

- A. Soon after Paul's trial, **King Herod Agrippa II** and his **sister Bernice** came to Caesarea to congratulate Festus on his new appointment. Agrippa was the son of Herod Agrippa I, who murdered James, imprisoned Peter, and was struck dead by the Lord (Acts 12). Bernice seems to have been a woman of questionable moral character (v.13).
- B. As King Agrippa was spending many days with Festus, the governor discussed Paul's case with him in great detail. He explained to the king how the charges brought against Paul by the Jews were not criminal charges; rather, they were on certain points of dispute about their own religion and about "**a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive.**" After describing Paul's appeal to Caesar, King Agrippa requested his own hearing with Paul which Festus arranged the following day (vv.14-22).

XII. PAUL BEFORE KING AGRIPPA

Acts 25:23 -26:32: ²³The 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. ²⁴Festus 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. ²⁵I found he had done nothing deserving of death, but because he made his appeal to the Emperor I decided to send him to Rome. ²⁶But I have nothing definite to write to His Majesty about him. Therefore I have brought him before all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that as a result of this investigation I may have something to write. ²⁷For I think it is unreasonable to send on a prisoner without specifying the charges against him.”

^{26:1}Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You have permission to speak for yourself.”

So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defense: ²“King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews, ³and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.

⁴“The Jews all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem. ⁵They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee. ⁶And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers that I am on trial today. ⁷This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. O king, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me. ⁸Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?

⁹“I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. ¹¹Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In

my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.

¹²“On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. ¹³About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. ¹⁴We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’

¹⁵“Then I asked, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ ““I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied. ¹⁶“Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of Me and what I will show you. ¹⁷I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them ¹⁸to 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.’

¹⁹“So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. ²⁰First 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. ²¹That is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. ²²But I have had God’s help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen—²³that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to His own people and to the Gentiles.”

²⁴At this point Festus interrupted Paul’s defense. “You are out of your mind, Paul!” he shouted. “Your great learning is driving you insane.” ²⁵“I am not insane, most excellent Festus,” Paul replied. “What I am saying is true and reasonable. ²⁶The 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. ²⁷King Agrippa do you believe the prophets? I know you do.” ²⁸Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?” ²⁹Paul replied, “Short time or long—I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.”

³⁰*The king rose, and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them.* ³¹*They left the room, and while talking with one another, they said, “This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment.”* ³²*Agrippa said to Festus, “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”*

A. “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.” (v.23)

1. At the time of Paul’s conversion, Christ had revealed through Ananias that the apostle would *carry His name before the Gentiles and their kings* (Acts 9:16); that prophetic word was about to be fulfilled now, and later in Rome when Paul was to stand before Caesar.
2. Since Agrippa was a Jew, and therefore conversant with matters involving Judaism, Festus hoped he would get some help in drawing up a suitable charge.

B. Festus begins the hearing by going over the history of the Paul’s case again—the charges and demands of the Jews for Paul’s death, Festus’ inability to find the apostle guilty of any crime deserving of death, and Paul’s appeal to Caesar. Festus knew he had a serious dilemma: he was now forced by Paul’s appeal to send him to Nero, but there was no legal basis for a trial. Festus plainly stated that he was hoping Agrippa would be able to help him resolve the matter (vv.24-27).

C. “Then Agrippa said to Paul, ‘You have permission to speak for yourself.’ So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defense: ‘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.’” (Acts 26:1-3)

1. The scene here has been described as “the enslaved king and the enthroned prisoner.” From a spiritual standpoint, Agrippa was a weak, pitiable figure, while Paul stands up in regal form, soaring far above his circumstances. Although Paul is the prisoner on trial, he seems to take command of the courtroom, and finally, it is *Paul* cross-examining King Agrippa!

2. Paul was genuinely grateful to have a hearing before Agrippa, for he was very much aware of the king's familiarity with Judaism.
- D. Paul first appeals to his exemplary life as a Jew, which, if they were willing to testify, all of the Jews would have to admit they knew about; Paul's zeal and orthodoxy as a strict Pharisee was widely known (vv.4-5).
- E. "And now **it is because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers that I am on trial today**. This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. O king, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me. Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead? (vv.6-8)
1. Paul's only "crime" was in believing what the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had promised to the twelve tribes of Israel: that God raises the dead!
 2. Remember that Pharisees all believed in the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:6-8).
 3. He masterfully showed how illogical it was for the Jews to be sentencing him to death for believing exactly what they believed!
 4. "**Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?**" That was exactly what Abraham their father believed when he offered up his son Isaac (Heb. 11:19).
- F. Returning to his own personal testimony, Paul recounted the savage and unremitting campaign he had waged against Christians, opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth with all his might. He explained how he had arrested many followers of the Way, from Jerusalem to foreign cities, trying to force them to blaspheme, and even casting his vote against them when they were put to death (vv.9-11).
- G. In vv. 12-18, we have the **second record in Acts of Paul's own account of his conversion**, in addition to Luke's account given in Acts 9 [see *Section III.D* on p.258 of Part 11]; there are several unique details given in this account that are not mentioned in either of the other accounts:
1. "We all fell to the ground" (v.14) – the other accounts only mention Paul falling to the ground, although Luke says that

Paul's companions were *unable to speak for terror*
(Acts 9:7 – AMP)

2. Jesus told Paul, “**It is hard for you to kick against the goads.**” (v.14) *Goads* were sharp, pointed instruments (like our modern cattle prods) used to force stubborn animals to move. Any animal that kicked against the goad was only injuring himself. Paul had been kicking against the goad of the Holy Spirit's conviction. He had been fighting against God Himself, which had only made him more obsessed and filled with hatred.
 3. “I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of Me and what I will show you.” (v.16)
 4. “I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them 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.**” (vv.17-18) – This commission, found only in this account, gives a nice summary of what the gospel promises to do in a believer's life.
- H. “So then, King Agrippa, **I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven** [“heavenly vision” – KJV]. 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.” (vv.19-21)
1. Paul confidently informed the king that he had faithfully carried out Christ's commission, preaching everywhere that men should repent, turn to God, and prove their repentance by their actions.
 2. It was Paul's *preaching* that had incited the Jews to want to kill him!
- I. “**But I have had God's help to this very day**, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. 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.” (vv.22-23)

1. Paul acknowledged God’s help and protection to the present day, enabling and strengthening him to boldly **testify to small people**, like the unnamed cripple who was healed in Lystra (Acts 14:8-10), **and great people**, like Governor Festus and King Agrippa.
 2. All that Paul preached was in perfect harmony with the Old Testament Law and Prophets, which had predicted the Messiah’s ministry, His sufferings, and His resurrection (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47).
- J. “At this point **Festus** interrupted Paul’s defense. **‘You are out of your mind, Paul!’ he shouted. ‘Your great learning is driving you insane.’** ‘I am not insane, most excellent Festus,’ Paul replied. ‘What I am saying is true and reasonable.’” (vv.24-25)
1. Being a Gentile, Festus was obviously clueless concerning all that Paul had spoken; indeed, the preaching of the gospel is foolishness to those who are perishing, and spiritual truth seems like insanity to the natural man devoid of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 1:18; 2:14-16).
 2. Without any apparent irritation, Paul answered Festus calmly and respectfully, insisting that he was not insane, for the things Paul had been speaking were **true** and **reasonable**. The gospel of Jesus Christ is absolutely true and it is perfectly reasonable. It only seems foolish and unreasonable to those who are lost and still blinded by sin and the devil.
- K. “**“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. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.’ Then Agrippa said to Paul, ‘Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?’ Paul replied, ‘Short time or long—I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.’” (vv.26-29)
1. Realizing that Agrippa would better understand what he had been saying, Paul directly addressed the king, boldly trying to persuade him to become a Christian!

2. Paul knew that the testimony of Christ had not escaped the king’s notice—**it was not done in a corner!** The gospel is based on actual events, lived out in historical times and places. The news of Jesus Christ had travelled far and wide, especially His resurrection, an event confirmed by over 500 eyewitnesses (1 Cor. 15:6)!
 3. **“King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?** I know you do.” Checkmate! What wisdom God gave Paul in situations like this one. He would later admit to the Corinthians: “Crafty fellow that I am, I caught you by trickery!” (2 Cor. 12:16) If Agrippa said, “No, I don’t believe the prophets,” Paul’s Jewish accusers would have turned on him; if he said “Yes,” Agrippa knew where Paul was going with this—he was trying to lead the king to Christ right there in the courtroom!
 4. **“Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”** Whether this response from Agrippa was sincere or merely a lighthearted joke to relieve the pressure, Paul’s answer was dead serious: “I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am [a Christian!].”
 5. This is without a doubt one of Paul’s shining moments recorded for us in the book of Acts!
- L. With that, the king, Bernice, the governor, and all the other officials left the room. It is amazing how even the great and mighty flee in fear when confronted with their sins and the Risen Christ! Unfortunately, a Day is coming when there will be no place to hide (Rev. 6:14-17; 20:11-15). Agrippa and Festus both knew that Paul had done nothing deserving of death, and had he not appealed to Caesar, he could have been set free (vv.30-32).

XIII. PAUL SAILS FOR ROME

Acts 27:1-12: ¹When 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. ²We 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.

³The next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs. ⁴From there we put out to sea again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us. ⁵When we had sailed across the open sea off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia. ⁶There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board. ⁷We 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 of Crete, opposite Salmone. ⁸We moved along the coast with difficulty and came to a place called Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea.

⁹Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Fast. So Paul warned them, ¹⁰“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.” ¹¹But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship. ¹²Since 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.

- A. The “we” narrative is now resumed, after being broken off at Acts 21:18. We have no information about Luke’s movements during the two intervening years, but he likely spent much of the time in or around Caesarea (where Paul was kept in custody), making good use of his opportunities of gathering information about the early days of the Christian movement. Paul, Luke, and Aristarchus set sail from Caesarea en route to Rome; there were other prisoners on board who, like Paul, were being sent to Rome for trial. The ship landed at Myra in Lycia, where Paul and the others were transferred to an Alexandrian ship that was sailing for Italy (vv.1-6).
- B. Travel from Myra was very slow due to adverse winds. With great difficulty, the ship arrived off Cnidus and continued south around Crete, finally reaching Fair Havens, a harbor on the coast of Crete (vv.7-8).
- C. By now **considerable time had been lost due to unfavorable sailing conditions**. The approach of winter weather made further travel dangerous. The Fast (Day of Atonement) was

already over, so it must have been late September or early October. Paul warned the crew that navigation was unsafe and that if the voyage was continued, it would be disastrous and there would be great loss to the cargo, ship, and even the lives of some on board (vv.9-10).

- D. However, **they did not listen to Paul's advice.** The pilot and the owner of the ship wanted to sail on to Phoenix, a more suitable harbor to spend the winter that was about forty miles west of Fair Havens (vv.11-12).

XIV. THE STORM AT SEA

Acts 27:13-26: ¹³When 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. ¹⁴Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the "northeaster," swept down from the island. ¹⁵The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. ¹⁶As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure. ¹⁷When the men had hoisted it aboard, they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Fearing that they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. ¹⁸We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. ¹⁹On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. ²⁰When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.

²¹After 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. ²²But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. ²³Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me ²⁴and 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.' ²⁵So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. ²⁶Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island."

- A. When a gentle south wind began to blow, the mariners took that as a confirmation of their plan, so they set sail for Phoenix.

But soon they were caught in a **violent storm with hurricane force winds** called a “northeaster.” They lowered the anchor and let the ship be driven along by the storm. They were barely able to secure the lifeboat (vv.13-17).

- B. For days on end, the ship took such a violent battering that they began to throw the cargo and the ship’s tackle overboard. They had obviously taken on a lot of water, and this was necessary to lighten the load and prevent the ship from sinking. When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, they finally gave up all hope of being saved (vv.18-20).
- C. “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. 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.’” (vv.21-26)
1. Paul gave all the men a message of hope, but first reminded them that they should have listened to his advice;
 2. He told them that, although the ship would be lost, there would be no loss of life;
 3. An angel of God had spoken to Paul assuring him that he had to stand trial before Caesar in Rome, so they were not going to sink;
 4. However, they would run aground on an island;
 5. Paul, though just a prisoner, seemed to take command of the ship, issuing orders and making life and death decisions for everyone onboard.

XV. THE SHIPWRECK

Acts 27:27-44: ²⁷*On the fourteenth night we were still being driven across the Adriatic Sea, when about midnight the sailors sensed*

they were approaching land. ²⁸They 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.

²⁹Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight. ³⁰In 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. ³¹Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved.” ³²So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it fall away.

³³Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. “For the last fourteen days,” he said, “you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food—you haven’t eaten anything. ³⁴Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head.” ³⁵After 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. ³⁶They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. ³⁷Altogether there were 276 of us on board. ³⁸When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea.

³⁹When 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. ⁴⁰Cutting loose the anchors, 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.

⁴¹But 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.

⁴²The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. ⁴³But the centurion 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. ⁴⁴The rest were to get there on planks or on pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land in safety.

- A. **Fourteen days had elapsed** since they left Fair Havens. They were now drifting helplessly across the Adriatic Sea, About midnight the sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land, so they dropped four anchors and prayed for daylight (vv.27-29).

- B. Fearing for their lives, some of the sailors plotted to get ashore in the lifeboat, pretending they were going to lower more anchors. When Paul saw them trying to escape, he reported their plot to the centurion. He warned that unless the sailors remained on board, the rest would not be saved. So the soldiers cut away the ropes attached to the lifeboat and let it drift away (vv.30-32).
- C. Just before dawn, Paul urged everyone on the ship to eat, reminding them that they had gone two weeks without food. Now they needed to eat; their survival depended on it. The apostle assured them that not a hair of anyone's head would be lost. Then **Paul set the example** for them by **taking bread, giving thanks to God publicly for it**, and eating. How often we shrink from praying in front of others! Yet how often such prayer speaks louder than our preaching. They were all encouraged and ate food themselves. There were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship. After eating, they lightened the ship by throwing the uneaten grain into the sea (vv.31-38).
- D. When daylight came, they reached a sandy beach; the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The stern of the ship was broken in pieces by the pounding surf. The soldiers had planned to kill the prisoners to prevent their escape, but the centurion, wanting to save Paul, stopped them from carrying out their plan. He ordered all who could swim to make for shore. The rest were told to float in on boards or other parts of the ship. In this way, every one of the crew and passengers escaped safely to land (vv.39-44).

XVI. ASHORE ON MALTA

Acts 28:1-10: ¹Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. ²The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. ³Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. ⁴When 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 has not allowed him to live." ⁵But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. ⁶The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead, but after waiting a

long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.

⁷There 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. ⁸His 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. ⁹When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. ¹⁰They honored us in many ways and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed.

A. Paul and the crew had landed safely on the island of Malta which is about 60 miles south of Sicily. The islanders welcomed them and showed unusual kindness, building a fire to warm them because it was raining and cold. As Paul was throwing wood on the fire, a viper, 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 has not allowed him to live.” But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. The people expected him to swell up die, but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god (vv.1-6).

1. Luke seems to recognize that the **kindness shown them by the islanders** was actually God’s kindness toward them, for he calls it unusual; after their long ordeal at sea, they were greatly encouraged by the warmth and hospitality of the Malta natives.
2. In describing the details of **Paul’s snakebite**, Luke also seems to allude to a bigger picture:
 - a) It was the *heat* of the fire that drove out the viper; it was only after the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus that all of the demons in Israel got stirred up! Jesus taught that the fire of the Holy Spirit is what drives out demons:
Mat. 12:28: *But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.*
 - b) Paul suffered no harm from the viper’s bite; Jesus had promised His disciples that no poisonous serpent

(physical) or any power of the enemy (spiritual) could harm them:

Luke 10:18-19: ¹⁸He replied, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹I have given you authority to **trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.**

Mark 16:17-18: ¹⁷And these signs will accompany those who believe: In My name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸**they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.**

- c) Paul shook the snake off into the fire; the Lake of Fire is the final destiny awaiting the great serpent, Satan (Rev. 20:10).
- d) NOTE: Paul didn’t go looking for a serpent to pick up like the modern snake handlers!
- e) The islanders assumed that Paul was receiving Divine Justice for murder or some sort of crime, but when they saw that the viper’s poison was having no effect on him, they changed their minds and, like the Lystrans with Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:11-18), they said that he was a god [see *Section V.B* on p.158 of part 8].

B. By God’s providence, the **ship had landed near the estate of the chief official of the island, Publius**. He, like the rest of the islanders, showed great kindness and hospitality to Paul and his companions, taking them into his own home for three days. And also by God’s providence, **Publius’ father was sick** in bed with fever and dysentery; after Paul prayed and laid his hands on him, he was miraculously healed him. This news spread like wildfire, and over the course of the next three months, all of the sick on the island were brought to Paul and they were healed. The Maltese natives honored them in many other ways, even furnishing them with needed supplies when they were ready to set sail (vv.7-10).

XVII. ARRIVAL AT ROME

Acts 28:11-16: ¹¹After three months we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island. It was an Alexandrian ship with the

figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux. ¹²We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days. ¹³From there we set sail and arrived at Rhegium. The next day the south wind came up, and on the following day we reached Puteoli. ¹⁴There we found some brothers who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. ¹⁵The 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. ¹⁶When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him.

- A. After the three months of winter had passed, and it was safe to sail again, the centurion, with his prisoners, embarked on an Alexandrian ship which had wintered at the island. From Malta they sailed about eighty miles to Syracuse, the capital of Sicily. After a three-day stopover, they proceeded to Rhegium on the mainland of Italy. From there, they sailed to Puteoli, about 150 miles southeast of Rome. Paul found Christian brethren there, with whom he was permitted to enjoy fellowship for seven days (vv.11-14).
- B. We are not told how news of Paul's arrival reached Rome, but two different groups of brothers were there waiting to greet Paul and his companions. Paul thanked God and was greatly cheered and encouraged by the love of the saints in Rome. Upon arrival in Rome, Paul was permitted to live in a private home under house arrest, with a soldier who guarded him; this was probably more for his own protection, as Paul was not a flight risk (vv.15-16).

XVIII. PAUL PREACHES AT ROME UNDER GUARD

Acts 28:17-31: ¹⁷Three days later he called together the leaders of the Jews. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: "My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. ¹⁸They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. ¹⁹But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar—not that I had any charge to bring against my own people. ²⁰For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain."

²¹They replied, “We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of the brothers who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. ²²But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect.”

²³They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. ²⁴Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. ²⁵They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: “The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when He said through Isaiah the prophet:

²⁶“Go to this people and say, “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.”

²⁷For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’

²⁸“Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!” ²⁹[After he said this, the Jews left, arguing vigorously among themselves.] ³⁰For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. ³¹Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

A. In accordance with his custom of preaching the gospel to the Jews first, but not having the freedom to visit their synagogue, Paul sent out an invitation to all the Jewish leaders in Rome. Where there’s a will, there’s a way! He explained his case to them—his arrest, his innocence concerning all of the charges brought against him (he assured them that he had done nothing against the Jewish people or their customs), and his appeal to Caesar. Paul then clarified for them that his only crime was the *hope of Israel*—the hope of the fulfillment of the promises made to the Jewish patriarchs, especially the promise of the Messiah and the resurrection of the dead (vv.17-20).

- B. The Jewish leaders insisted that they had no knowledge of Paul; they had not received any letters from Judea, nor had they heard any bad reports about him. But they expressed an interest in hearing more about Paul’s views, for they had heard people everywhere talking against “this sect,”—the “sect” of Christianity (vv.21-22).
- C. “They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. **From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus** from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. (v.23)
- D. “**Some were convinced** by what he said, but **others would not believe**. They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: ‘The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when He said through Isaiah the prophet: “Go to this people and say, ‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.’ For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.” ‘Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!’ After he said this, the Jews left, arguing vigorously among themselves.” (vv.24-29)
- E. “For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.” (vv.30-31)

XIX. CONCLUSION

- A. Acts chapters 21-28 can be summarized in just a few simple words: How the Jewish religious leaders hated Paul! Their obsession to kill him is obviously reminiscent of Paul’s former passion to destroy the Christians.
- B. But how the apostle shines time after time in the most adverse situations: boldly addressing the crowd in Jerusalem after being nearly torn to pieces and arrested; speaking to Governor Felix and his wife about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come; practically converting King Agrippa right in

the courtroom during his hearing; his courage and command of the ship caught in a Northeaster; his amazing healing ministry on the island of Malta; and his boldness in preaching the gospel to the Jewish leaders in Rome while he was under house arrest! His zeal for God and his fearlessness before kings and mobs, in hurricanes and shipwrecks, or any other persecution or tribulation is truly inspiring. He was more than a conqueror, and nothing could separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:35-39).

- C. The book of Acts ends on a triumphant note, with Paul preaching boldly in his rented house while under guard in Rome. However, the reader is left hanging, not knowing Paul's fate or the outcome of his trial of appeal before Caesar. Obviously, as we will discuss further in part 12, the history of Paul and the Early Church doesn't end here. It is widely believed that Paul was released from this two-year imprisonment and had several more years of freedom to travel and minister before a second Roman imprisonment which ended in his death as a martyr for Jesus Christ.

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Part 12 - Conclusion

(No. 1119.12 – - NLC)

I. THE EXPANDING CHURCH TRIUMPHANT

- A. As discussed in part 1, *Introduction*, one of Luke’s primary goals in writing the book of Acts was to chronicle the birth of the Church through the outpouring of the promised Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. For good reason, the book of Acts has been traditionally called the “The Acts of the Apostles,” for throughout his account, Luke shows the vital role played by the apostles in the founding and expansion of the Early Church.
- B. Despite the almost continual opposition from the Jewish religious establishment (which often incited secondary persecutions and riots from the Gentiles), the apostles, elders and disciples of the Church boldly and fearlessly preached the gospel, ever extending and expanding its reach. The seed of Christ’s word was watered both with tears and the blood of many martyrs who made the ultimate sacrifice to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

II. ACTS AND BEYOND

- A. The book of Acts covers the period of time from A.D. 30 to A.D. 62 approximately. It is commonly believed that Luke finished writing Acts in A.D. 63, and there are several evidences to support this view:
 - 1. There is no mention of the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus of Rome in A.D. 70;
 - 2. There is no mention of the outcome of Paul’s appeal in Rome (and his eventual release);
 - 3. There is no mention of the martyrdom of James in Jerusalem (A.D. 63), Peter’s execution in Rome (A.D. 64), or Paul’s second Roman imprisonment and execution under Nero in Rome (A.D. 67 or 68); [see *Section II.D: Timeline of New Testament History* on p.293].

- B. There is considerable evidence indicating that Paul was released from his two-year house arrest in Rome described in Acts 28, and later rearrested, imprisoned and executed around A.D. 67 or 68:
1. Acts stops abruptly at this time;
 2. Paul wrote to churches expecting to visit them soon, so he must have anticipated a release (see Phil. 2:24; Phile. 22);
 3. A number of details in the Pastoral Epistles do not fit into the historical setting given in the book of Acts. These details indicate a return to Asia Minor, Crete and Greece after the events at the close of Acts;
 4. Tradition indicates that Paul went to Spain. Even if he did not go, the very fact that a tradition arose suggests a time when he could have taken such a journey.
- C. Well, here we are... we have come to the conclusion of the book of Acts and our study thereof. Hopefully, we know a bit more about the history of the Church. But, as we have emphasized from the beginning of this study, our hope and prayer is not to merely fill our heads with dates and historical facts; rather, that God would stir our hearts to continue what Peter, James, Stephen, Philip, Paul, Barnabas and a host of others started! We have received the same power they did to be Christ's witnesses in our home, our neighborhood, our workplace, and maybe even in the jungles of a foreign mission field. So let's "write" Acts chapters 29, 30, 31, etc. as we declare to the world, "There is another King, one called Jesus who is risen from the dead and coming soon in glory!"

D. Timeline of New Testament History

(All dates are approximate)

TIMELINE OF NEW TESTAMENT HISTORY		
YEAR A.D.	CHURCH EVENT	N.T. BOOK WRITTEN
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Paul born in Tarsus of Cilicia (Acts 22:3; Phil. 3:5)	
15-20	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Paul trained under Gamaliel in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3)	
30	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Jesus' death, resurrection, ascension;· Day of Pentecost (Acts 2)	
31	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Peter heals crippled man in temple (Acts 3)· Peter and John arrested by Sanhedrin (Acts 4)	
32	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Joseph (Barnabus) sells a field (Acts 4:36)· Ananias & Sapphira die; apostles arrested but released by angel (Acts 5)	
33	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Seven deacons chosen (Acts 6)	
34	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Saul arrives in Jerusalem· Stephen stoned to death, Paul present (Acts 7:59)· Saul persecutes the church in Jerusalem· Philip goes to Samaria, meets Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8)	
35	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Saul converted on road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-9)· Saul goes to Damascus (Acts 9:10-19)· Saul leaves for Arabia (Gal. 1:17)	

TIMELINE OF NEW TESTAMENT HISTORY

YEAR A.D.	CHURCH EVENT	N.T. BOOK WRITTEN
36-37	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Saul remains in Arabia, possibly for 3 years 	
38	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Saul returns to preach in Damascus · Saul's life is threatened, escapes to Jerusalem (Acts 9:23-29) · Barnabus introduces Saul to disciples · Saul with Peter 15 days (Gal. 1:18-19) · Saul flees to Tarsus (Acts 9:29-30) 	
39	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Saul preaches in Cilicia and Syria for 5 years (Acts 9:30; Gal. 1:21) · Peter's ministry in Judea, Lydda & Joppa (Acts 9:36-43) · Peter called to Caesarea by Cornelius (Acts 10) 	
40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Peter defends his ministry in Cornelius' house to the church leaders in Jerusalem (Acts 11) · Saul is preaching in Cilicia & Syria 	
41	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Saul is preaching in Cilicia & Syria 	
42	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Saul is preaching in Cilicia & Syria 	
43	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Barnabus brings Saul back to teach in for a year in the church at Antioch in Syria (Acts 11:25-26) · Disciples in Antioch called "Christians" 	

TIMELINE OF NEW TESTAMENT HISTORY

YEAR A.D.	CHURCH EVENT	N.T. BOOK WRITTEN
44	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Agabus, a prophet from Jerusalem, visits Antioch church · Antioch church sends Paul & Barnabus to Jerusalem with aid (11:27-30) · James is beheaded by Herod Agrippa I · Peter is arrested, freed by an angel · Herod Agrippa I dies in Caesarea (Acts 12) 	
45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Paul & Barnabus return from Jerusalem to Antioch with John Mark (Acts 12:25) 	James writes James from Jerusalem
46	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Paul & Barnabus leave on their first missionary journey, which lasts 2 years (Acts 13 - 14:28) 	
47	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Paul & Barnabas travel to Paphos, then to Perga & Pamphylia where John Mark departs for home (Acts 13:13) · Paul & Barnabas visit Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe (Acts 13-14) 	
48	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Paul & Barnabas return to Antioch in Syria and report about their journey to the church (Acts 14:24-28) · Judaizers confuse the Antioch church 	Paul writes Galatians from Antioch in Syria
49	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Jerusalem Council (Acts 15; Gal. 2:1-10) · Judas and Silas chosen by the apostles to return to Antioch with Paul and Barnabus (Acts 15:22) · Paul & Barnabas teach & preach in Antioch 	

TIMELINE OF NEW TESTAMENT HISTORY

YEAR A.D.	CHURCH EVENT	N.T. BOOK WRITTEN
50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Contention over John Mark; Barnabus & John Mark to Cyprus (Acts 15:36-39) · Paul takes Silas on his second missionary journey, which lasts 2 years (Acts 15:40 - 18:23) · Paul & Silas go to Derbe & Lystra, Timothy joins them (Acts 16:1-5) · In Troas, Paul sees a vision of a Macedonian man; Luke joins the group as they sail for Philippi, where they meet Lydia (Acts 16:9-15) · Paul & Silas in prison in Philippi (Acts 16:11-40) · Paul preaches in Thessalonica, starts a church and a riot (Acts 17:1-10) · Paul goes to Berea, leaves Silas & Timothy and flees to Athens (Acts 17:10-15) · Paul in Athens alone (17:16-33) 	<p>Matthew writes his gospel of Matthew</p>
51	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Paul goes to Corinth alone, meets Aquila & Priscilla, is rejoined with Silas & Timothy (Acts 18:1-17) · Paul stays in Corinth, starts church, appears before Gallio (18:12) 	<p>Paul writes 1 Thessalonians from Corinth</p>
52	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Paul leaves Corinth, sails for Ephesus, left Aquila & Priscilla in Ephesus (18:18-20) · Paul returns to Antioch, Syria 	<p>Paul writes 2 Thessalonians from Corinth</p>
53	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Paul begins third missionary journey, which lasts 5 years (Acts 18:23 - 21:17) · Paul travels through Galatia and Phrygia, then arrives in Ephesus, · Aquila and Priscilla meet Apollos in Ephesus, explain the gospel to him (Acts 18:24-26) · Apollos goes to Corinth (Acts 18:27) · Paul stays in Ephesus for 3 years (Acts 19:1-41) 	

TIMELINE OF NEW TESTAMENT HISTORY

YEAR A.D.	CHURCH EVENT	N.T. BOOK WRITTEN
54	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Paul is in Ephesus all year 	
55	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Paul's ministry continues in Ephesus 	Paul writes 1 Corinthians from Ephesus
56	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Paul leaves Ephesus for Corinth, Troas, Macedonia & Greece (Acts 20) · Paul exhorts the Ephesian elders at Miletus (Acts 20:15-38) 	Paul writes 2 Corinthians from Macedonia
57	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Paul arrives in Jerusalem, a riot erupts and he is arrested at the temple and put in prison (Acts 21:17-36) · Paul addresses the crowd (Acts 21:37 – 22:21) · Paul appears before the Sanhedrin (Acts 22:30 - 23:10) · Jews plan to kill Paul so he is transferred to Felix the governor in Caesarea (Acts 23:12-35) · Paul appears before Felix (Acts 24:1-27) · Paul is in prison in Caesarea for two years (Acts 24:27) 	Paul writes Romans from Corinth
58	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Paul remains in prison in Caesarea 	
59	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Paul remains in prison in Caesarea · Paul appears before Festus and King Herod Agrippa II (Acts 25 - 26) · Paul appeals to Caesar so he is sent to Rome by Festus (25:11-12) · Paul sails for Rome; after a violent storm and shipwreck, they reach the island of Malta (Acts 27:1 – 28:10) 	

TIMELINE OF NEW TESTAMENT HISTORY

YEAR A.D.	CHURCH EVENT	N.T. BOOK WRITTEN
60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Paul arrives in Rome and is allowed to live by himself with a Roman soldier to guard him (Acts 28:14-16) 	Paul writes Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon & Philipians from Rome
61	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Paul continues in Rome under house arrest 	
62	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Paul continues in Rome under house arrest · Peter comes to Rome · Paul is released from Roman imprisonment · Paul leaves on his fourth missionary journey, which lasts for 5 years (from A.D. 62-67); possibly travels to Spain or first visits Philippi and Corinth along with other churches in Achaia and Macedonia 	Peter writes 1 Peter from Rome
63	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · James, the Lord's brother, is martyred in Jerusalem · Paul is in Spain 	Paul writes 1 Timothy & Titus from Philippi
64	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Paul is in Spain · Peter is martyred in Rome · Paul returns from Spain to Crete & leaves Titus at Crete (Titus 1:5) 	Peter writes 2 Peter from Rome
65	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Paul travels through Macedonia and Asia 	
66	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Paul probably spends time in Colosse, Ephesus, Miletus 	

TIMELINE OF NEW TESTAMENT HISTORY

YEAR A.D.	CHURCH EVENT	N.T. BOOK WRITTEN
67	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Paul's second Roman imprisonment · Paul is executed by Nero in A.D. 67 or 68 	Paul writes 2 Timothy from the Mamertine dungeon in Rome
68-69		Hebrews is written by an unknown author
70	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Titus besieges Jerusalem 	
94-96	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The apostle John sent to the Isle of Patmos by Emperor Domitian · John receives the book of Revelation · John is released from Patmos and returns to Ephesus (?) 	