



# ACTS THE AMAZING HISTORY OF THE EARLY CHURCH

The history of the early church comes to life in this chapter-by-chapter study of the Book of Acts.

While teaching at Conquerors Bible College in Portland, Oregon, Jet Witherspoon saw the need for a textbook on Acts that would bring proper emphasis to the Pentecostal doctrine. After two years of study, research, writing and rewriting her manuscript, it was published in 1971. For the last thirty years this dynamic chapter-by-chapter study on the history of the early church has been used in numerous Bible colleges.



**Jet Witherspoon Toole** was filled with the Holy Spirit in 1915 as a teenager under the ministry of Howard A. Goss. Later she married Evangelist W. L. Stallones. After their children, Eloise, Revel and Newell Arlen, were born, the Stallones pastored widely scattered churches from St. Stephens, New Brunswick, Canada, to California. Brother Stallones died in 1939. In the fall of 1945 when the Pentecostal Assemblies of Jesus Christ, superintended by W. T. Witherspoon and the Pentecostal Church Inc., superintended by Howard A. Goss, merged, there was another merger when Jet Stallones married Brother Witherspoon. Two years later Brother Witherspoon died and Jet Witherspoon joined the faculty of Pentecostal Bible Institute in Tupelo, Mississippi. Later she moved to Portland, Oregon, and taught at Conquerors Bible College until she retired at seventy-seven. In 1977 she married her old-time friend Earl Toole. Jet Witherspoon Toole went on to be with the Lord in April of 1992.



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ACTS: THE AMAZING HISTORY OF THE EARLY CHURCH JET WITHERSPOON TOOLE

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JET WITHERSPOON TOOLE

**ACTS**



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the Early Church

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# Acts

By Jet Witherspoon

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# Contents

Introduction . . . . .	7
Chapter 1 . . . . .	9
Chapter 2 . . . . .	19
Chapter 3 . . . . .	33
Chapter 4 . . . . .	41
Chapter 5 . . . . .	51
Chapter 6 . . . . .	63
Chapter 7 . . . . .	69
Chapter 8 . . . . .	75
Chapter 9 . . . . .	87
Chapter 10 . . . . .	103
Chapter 11 . . . . .	109
Chapter 12 . . . . .	115
Chapter 13 . . . . .	123
Chapter 14 . . . . .	129
Chapter 15 . . . . .	135
Chapter 16 . . . . .	145
Chapter 17 . . . . .	157
Chapter 18 . . . . .	167
Chapter 19 . . . . .	175
Chapter 20 . . . . .	183
Chapter 21 . . . . .	189
Chapter 22 . . . . .	197
Chapter 23 . . . . .	203
Chapter 24 . . . . .	211
Chapter 25 . . . . .	219
Chapter 26 . . . . .	225
Chapter 27 . . . . .	231
Chapter 28 . . . . .	241
Questions On Each Chapter . . . . .	251



## Introduction

- Author:** Luke was the author of both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. His character and personality may be discerned from his writings and from the few scriptural references to his person. (See Luke 1:3; Colossians 4:14; II Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24.)
- Date:** The Book of Acts concluded with the account of Paul's early ministry in Rome, about A.D. 65, and appears to have been written near that time.
- To Whom Written:** Luke addressed both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts to Theophilus, of whom little is known except that he seems to have been a close friend to Luke. The Book of Acts is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke.
- Theme:** The theme of the Book of Acts is the history, development, and growth of the early church, from the ascension of Christ to Paul's imprisonment in Rome and the beginning of his ministry there.
- The Key Word:** The word "witness," which is used more than thirty times, seems to be the key word.
- Divisions:** The Book of Acts is naturally divided into two parts. Part I (Chapters 1 through 12) is concerned mostly with the apostolic ministry in and near Jerusalem. Peter was the most



## *Acts*

prominent minister of this period. Part II (Chapters 13 through 28) is concerned mostly with the apostolic ministry to the Gentile world. Paul was the most prominent minister of this period.

## THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

# Chapter 1

### **Luke's Opening Address to Theophilus**

(Verses 1-2)

Luke addressed both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts to Theophilus. In Luke 1:3 he addressed him as “most excellent Theophilus,” by which he evidently referred to his character. And we may assume that Theophilus was deeply interested in the life of Christ, of whom Luke had written to him in his former treatise (the Gospel of Luke), and also in the apostolic ministry, of which Luke was now writing a second treatise. Luke began his story of the apostolic ministry where he left off in the last verses of the Gospel of Luke on the life of Christ. In fact, the last verses of Luke and the first verses of Acts overlap. In both passages he recorded Jesus’ last instruction to His disciples and His ascension.

Luke’s reference to his former treatise, in which he had written of all that Jesus began to do and to teach, strongly implied that he now wrote (in Acts) of that which He continued to do and teach through the ministry of His Spirit-filled disciples. The works which Jesus did while He

was on earth did not cease when He ascended back to heaven. He had told the disciples, “He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father” (John 14:12). The disciples went forth from the day of Pentecost, filled with the Spirit of Christ, to perform, by the power of His Spirit, the same works He had wrought when He was here in the flesh, but in much greater scope, as His representatives spread out into all parts of the world.

### **Infallible Proofs of Jesus’ Resurrection**

(Verse 3)

Luke reminded Theophilus of the forty days following Jesus’ resurrection, during which time His many appearances to His disciples were infallible proofs that He was indeed alive from the dead. The fact of the resurrection of Jesus is essentially basic to the gospel message of salvation. If He had only died but had not come forth in the resurrection, men still would not have been saved (I Corinthians 15:13-23).

Jesus commissioned His disciples to testify of His gospel to the world (Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-48), but they would only be able to witness to that which they had seen and experienced. One of the basic requirements of apostles was that they must have seen the Lord alive after His resurrection (I Corinthians 15:1-10). An eyewitness account of the resurrection of Jesus was necessary by which to lay the foundation of the New Testament church.

The church was to be built on the foundation of the confession of faith in the deity of Jesus by divine revelation (Matthew 16:15-18). Peter, whose confession was

made before the crucifixion of Jesus, had his faith confirmed after His resurrection (Mark 16:6-14; John 20:19-23; 21:1-17). And his faith was again confirmed by the infilling of the Holy Ghost before he was equipped to use the keys of the kingdom to open the door of salvation to men by witnessing to them of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:1-38).

The resurrection of Jesus is doubtless the best attested fact in the Gospel records. Since the Jews knew that Jesus had said He would rise from the dead, they took every precaution to preclude any possibility of His body being stolen and a rumor spread that He had arisen from the dead. They requested of Pilate that the tomb be sealed and put under heavy guard to prevent any such occurrence. And he gave them permission to make it as sure as they could (Matthew 27:62-66). Their efforts would certainly have prevented any attempt to steal the body but could not prevent the resurrection of Jesus.

Very early on the first day of the week (Sunday) there was a great earthquake. The angel of the Lord rolled back the stone from the door of the tomb and sat on it. The glory of heaven which shone from his countenance and raiment struck the guards dumb and paralyzed them with terror (Matthew 28:1-8).

When the women came to anoint the body of Jesus, the angel, who still sat on the stone, announced to them the resurrection of Jesus and sent them to tell His disciples. They, too, feared this miraculous demonstration, but their fear was mingled with joy for the news that Jesus was alive.

Only the guards were present when Jesus arose from the dead, and some of them went immediately to the chief

priests and related all that had happened. The priests then bribed them with a large sum of money to lie that the body of Jesus had been stolen from the tomb (Matthew 28:11-15). But their lies were rendered ineffective by the infallible proofs of His many appearances to His disciples during the forty days between His resurrection and ascension. And He continued to prove Himself to be alive by the miraculous working of the Holy Ghost in His saints after the Day of Pentecost.

### **Jesus' Last Instruction Before His Ascension**

(Verses 4-5)

Jesus' last instruction to His disciples before He ascended into heaven was to command them to return to Jerusalem to wait for the promise of the Father. He explained that this promise was the Holy Ghost which John the Baptist had promised they should receive (Matthew 3:1-2, 11).

The Holy Ghost was called the promise of the Father because God had many times promised it in the Scriptures. Jeremiah said that God would write His laws on the minds and in the hearts of His people (Jeremiah 31:31-34), and Paul interpreted this as His new covenant in the Holy Ghost (Hebrews 8:1-13). Ezekiel promised that God would put His Spirit within His people to give them a new heart and a new spirit (Ezekiel 36:26-27). Joel promised that He would pour out His Spirit on all flesh (Joel 2:28-29). And Jesus promised to fill the thirsty with the living water of the Holy Ghost (John 7:37-39). This was the Comforter which He had promised to send upon them when He went away (John 14:16-20, 26), and now the fulfillment of the promise was near.

**The Disciples' Misunderstanding**  
(Verses 6-8)

When Jesus told the disciples to return to Jerusalem to wait for the coming of the Holy Ghost, they, having no concept of the working of the Holy Ghost, asked if He would at this time restore the kingdom to Israel. The dream and hope of all the Jews since the time of the Babylonian captivity had been the prophetic promise of the restoration of their kingdom. That promise had been only partially fulfilled under the decree of Cyrus to permit them to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple (Ezra 1:1-11).

From the time that Zerubbabel led the first company back to begin building, the people of Israel had gradually filtered back into the land of Palestine till the time of Christ and the apostles, when the little country was largely populated by Israelites. But they had never become an independent nation and were presently under Roman rule, which they hated.

The disciples of Jesus also had associated the coming of Messiah with the restoration of the kingdom and had hoped that Jesus would deliver them from Roman rule (Luke 24:21). Their hope was now revived in the thought that the resurrected Jesus would deliver them from Roman rule and make them an independent nation again.

Jesus explained that it was not yet the time to bring them into political power. Their conquest at this time would not be for a natural but for a spiritual kingdom. They were to receive power in the Holy Ghost to witness to the world of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus as God's means to save men from sin (I Corinthians 15:1-4). Through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus in

## *Acts*

the power of the Holy Ghost (I Corinthians 2:1-5), men of all nations and races should be converted from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of God (Colossians 1:13-14).

The greatest power possible to men in this life is in the Holy Ghost. When one's life is surrendered to God, he is possessed of God's Spirit by which he receives power with God and with men. When God conquered the proud and self-willed spirit of Jacob, He changed him from Jacob (supplanter) to Israel (a prince with God), having power with God and with men (Genesis 32:24-28). And He changed Saul of Tarsus into the apostle Paul who, even as a prisoner, exerted more power over his captors than they were able to exert over him (Acts 27:9-44).

James wrote that God chose to make the poor of this world rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom of God (James 2:5). Greater things are accomplished by faith in God than by all the political, military, or physical powers in the world.

### **The Ascension of Jesus**

(Verses 9-11)

Immediately after Jesus promised the disciples power in the Holy Ghost, His feet lifted from the earth and He began to ascend into heaven. As the disciples watched Him ascend, a cloud came down and enveloped Him, hiding Him from their view. This was the same glory cloud out of which God spoke from Mount Sinai and which led the people of Israel in their wandering in the wilderness (Exodus 19:9, 17-20; 40:34-38). Jesus was now glorified together with the Father with the same glory He had before the world was (John 17:5). And He has promised to return to earth on that same glory cloud (Revelation

1:7; 14:14) into which He will catch away His waiting saints (I Thessalonians 4:17).

The disciples must have felt a sense of forlorn loneliness as Jesus vanished from their sight into the cloud. They perhaps realized that He would not again appear to them as a man. But, as their spirits drooped, two angels in white apparel appeared and encouraged them with the promise that Jesus would return in the same manner in which they had seen Him disappear into the cloud.

This promise has been the hope and comfort of the saints of God during all the church age and will continue to be until He comes to take us to be with Him where He is (John 14:1-6) in immortality. The message of the second coming of Jesus is the greatest hope of the church (Titus 2:13), the greatest comfort to Christians (I Thessalonians 4:14-18), and the greatest incentive to consistent Christian living (Luke 21:34-36; Matthew 24:44-46; II Peter 3:10-14; I John 2:28; 3:2-3).

### **The Disciples Return to Jerusalem**

(Verses 12-14)

After the disciples received the reassuring message of the angels, they obediently and joyfully returned to Jerusalem to wait for the outpouring of the Holy Ghost (Luke 24:52). The place from which Jesus ascended was on the Mount of Olives a short distance west of the town of Bethany. It was a Sabbath day's journey from Jerusalem, which was a little less than a mile. (The law of Moses forbade the people of Israel to travel farther than this on the Sabbath day.)

When the disciples arrived in Jerusalem, they went into an upper room where they could wait in prayer. This



room seems to have been within the Temple grounds, since they were said to have been continually in the Temple praising and blessing God (Luke 24:53). There were approximately one hundred and twenty disciples who gathered in the upper room to wait for the coming of the Holy Ghost. The eleven apostles who were named and the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, were among the one hundred and twenty disciples. The whole company continued in prayer and supplication with one accord (with the one purpose), that they might receive the promise of the Father.

**The Election to Fill the Apostolic Vacancy  
Left by Judas  
(Verses 15-26)**

Peter took the initiative in pointing out to the group the necessity of electing one to fill the vacancy left by Judas. He spoke to them of David's prophecy of the failure of Judas (Psalm 41:9; John 13:18-19). He referred to Zechariah's prophecy of the price for which he sold the Lord and which was used to buy the potter's field as a burying place for strangers (Zechariah 11:12-13; Matthew 26:14-16; 27:3-10). He then reminded them of David's prophecy of the betrayer of Christ, which said his habitation should be desolate (Psalm 69:25), and of that which said another should take his office (Psalm 109:8). He concluded from these Scriptures that it was now their duty to elect from among their number one who had been one of Jesus' disciples from the time of the baptism of John, to fill the vacancy left by Judas.

They appointed Joseph, called Barsabas and surnamed Justus, and Matthias. Perhaps these were the only

two who qualified as the earliest disciples of Jesus. After praying that God would direct their lot, they chose between these two men by casting lots. There seems to have been various ways of deciding a matter by lot, which was a frequent practice in Bible times. The most simple form, which was probably used on this occasion, was to put the names of the individuals concerned on stones, pieces of board, or slips of parchment and put them into an urn. After praying, they would draw out one of the names by which the case was decided.

The apostles acted sincerely and in good faith. And God no doubt honored their action and caused the lot to fall on Matthias, who for the time filled out the necessary number of the twelve apostles to head the New Testament church. But it is possible that they acted somewhat prematurely since they had not yet been filled with the Holy Ghost. There is no further mention made of Matthias or of his ministry. He no doubt performed a worthy ministry. But the subsequent history of the early church lends strong evidence that Saul of Tarsus was chosen of God to fill this particular office of one of the twelve apostles (Acts 9:15; Romans 1:1; 11:13; I Corinthians 15:5-10). The twelve apostles were chosen for the specific purpose of laying the foundation of the New Testament church (I Corinthians 3:10-11; Ephesians 2:19-22; Revelation 21:14). They laid this foundation by preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 15:1-4), the only means of men's salvation (Romans 1:16), which they received by divine revelation (Galatians 1:11-24; 2:1-8).



# Chapter 2

## **The Meaning of Pentecost**

(Verse 1)

The one hundred and twenty disciples, in obedience to Jesus' command (Luke 24:49-53; Acts 1:4-5), had waited and prayed in an upper room for about ten days before the Day of Pentecost. They had not known when the Holy Ghost would come but had tarried in faith, and in God's appointed time He poured out His Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

The Feast of Pentecost was one of Israel's three main yearly religious feasts. It was called "Pentecost" because it was observed fifty days after the Feast of Firstfruits (Leviticus 23:15-16). The name "Pentecost" simply means fifty. The Feast of Firstfruits was observed on the day following the first Sabbath after the Passover (Leviticus 23:11). This, of course, was the first day of the week (Sunday) since the Sabbath was the seventh day of the week (Saturday). The Feast of Firstfruits, which marked the beginning of Israel's spring grain harvest, was one of thanksgiving to the Lord.

## *Acts*

This feast foreshadowed the resurrection of Jesus, who was crucified at the time of the Passover and arose from the dead on the day of Firstfruits, which followed the Sabbath after Passover (Mark 15:42-47; 16:1-8; Luke 23:50-56; 24:1-12).

Jesus was seen of His disciples on a number of occasions during the next forty days. Then He ascended from the Mount of Olives, and, after another ten days, the Holy Ghost came on the Day of Pentecost, exactly fifty days after He had arisen from the dead on the day of Firstfruits. We speak of the infilling of the Holy Ghost as the Pentecostal experience because it was first received at the Feast of Pentecost.

The Passover was prophetic of Christ's crucifixion (I Corinthians 5:7), the Feast of Firstfruits was prophetic of His resurrection (I Corinthians 15:20-23), and the Feast of Pentecost was prophetic of the coming of the Holy Ghost. The Feast of Pentecost, which was another feast of thanksgiving, marked the end of Israel's spring grain harvest. The fact that the Feast of Firstfruits celebrated the beginning of the spring harvest, and the Feast of Pentecost celebrated the end of this harvest season, was highly significant. God's harvest of souls to an eternal inheritance (Matthew 13:18-23, 36-43) will be the ultimate result of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection and pouring out of His Spirit, the earnest of the eternal inheritance, upon His people.

### **The Outpouring of the Holy Ghost**

(Verses 2-4)

Before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4-11), the Lord foreordained the redemption of men by

the sacrifice of Christ, and He has a definite time schedule for all His works. He would send the Holy Ghost on this particular Day of Pentecost which followed Jesus' death and resurrection.

When the day was fully come, suddenly there was a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, which filled the house. Jesus had explained to Nicodemus that the new birth would be like the blowing of the wind, or the breath of God (John 3:8). And after His resurrection, on the occasion of His appearing to the ten disciples (Thomas being absent), He renewed His commission to send them into the world with the gospel and then, breathing on them, said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost" (John 20:19-23). We know they did not receive the Holy Ghost at that time, for Jesus had not yet ascended into heaven, and the Holy Ghost was not given until He ascended to be glorified with the same glory He had before the world was. (See John 7:39; 17:5; Acts 2:32-33.) So we must conclude that He simply indicated the nature of the Holy Ghost (the breath of God) and the manner in which He should come.

God is Spirit (John 4:24). And there is only one divine Spirit, who is the Lord. (See Ephesians 4:4-6.) The eternal Word, who was with God and was God, was made flesh for the purpose of redemption. (See John 1:1-14; Hebrews 2:14-18.) God formed man of the dust of the earth and breathed into him the breath of life so that he became a living soul (Genesis 2:7). He, by sin, lost that eternal life which God had given him, but before the foundation of the world God ordained his restoration through redemption in Christ (Ephesians 1:4-11). And now again, through Christ, He breathed a portion of His eternal

## *Acts*

Spirit into the souls of mortal men. The Spirit of God is His life or breath.

In the New Testament the Holy Ghost is called the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of Christ. And when one is filled with His Spirit, he has a portion of the very life of God within him, by which he is made partaker of the divine nature of the Lord Jesus Christ (II Peter 1:3-4). On the Day of Pentecost the Lord breathed His Spirit into the souls of the one hundred and twenty disciples who had been tarrying in the upper room. And He will continue to breathe His Spirit into the souls of believers till He returns for His church.

### **The Witness of the Holy Ghost**

(Verses 4-13)

When the disciples were filled with the Holy Ghost they began to speak with other tongues (languages) as the Spirit gave them utterance. Jews and Jewish proselytes from many different nations were in Jerusalem at this time for the Feast of Pentecost. And these who spoke the languages of the countries in which they lived heard the Spirit-filled disciples, many of whom were uneducated Galileans, speaking in their (the visitors') own languages. They knew these Galileans had had no opportunity to learn the many different languages which they heard them speaking, but they did not understand the meaning of this miracle. Some, like many today, were unwilling to concede that it was a miracle and accused the disciples of being drunk on new wine. But, of course, it was unreasonable to assume that intoxication could cause men to speak in a language they did not know. And men of

every nation which were represented in Jerusalem that day heard them speaking in their own languages.

God chose to manifest the incoming of His Spirit by Himself speaking through these men of whom He gained full possession. Isaiah prophesied of this day and this experience. He said, "For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear" (Isaiah 28:11-12).

This Spirit-filled experience was the rest of which Jesus spoke when He said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). And this was the refreshing of which Peter preached, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). In three of the five accounts in Acts of people's being filled with the Holy Ghost, it was specifically stated that they spoke in other tongues (Acts 2:4; 10:44-46; 19:1-7). In the account of the Samaritans, who received the Holy Ghost when Peter and John laid hands on them, it was strongly implied that they spoke in tongues. The manifestation of the Spirit caused Simon the sorcerer to offer the apostles money to give him that power (Acts 8:14-20). And Saul of Tarsus, who was filled with the Holy Ghost when Ananias laid hands on him and prayed for him (Acts 9:17-18), later testified that he spoke in tongues more than all the Corinthians (I Corinthians 14:18-19). Jesus told His disciples, "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from



## *Acts*

the Father, he shall testify of me: and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning” (John 15:26-27).

Some admit that the early church spoke in tongues but contend that it is not necessary today and that this manifestation ceased. But there is no scriptural authority for such a supposition. The Spirit which was poured out on the saints of apostolic times was given as the result of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection and was intended for the entire church dispensation. The six Jews who accompanied Peter to the house of Cornelius witnessed that the Gentiles received the same experience of the Holy Ghost that the Jews had received, for they heard them speak with tongues (Acts 10:45, 46; 11:12-18).

## **PETER’S SERMON ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST**

### **Joel’s Prophecy Fulfilled**

(Verses 14-21)

It was Peter who first confessed the deity of Jesus, and on that occasion Jesus promised to give to him the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 16:13-19). He took this illustration from the custom that when a Jew became a doctor of the law he was given the keys to the room in which were kept the scrolls of the Scriptures. Peter was authorized to give the first gospel message by which to open the door into the spiritual kingdom of God. This is the kingdom which Jesus said comes not with observation but is within men (Luke 17:20-21). And Paul said that it is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (Romans 14:17).

So, by the authority of Jesus, Peter preached the first

gospel sermon, and the basis of his sermon was the people's amazement at the miracle of speaking with other tongues. By the way of introduction, he told the mockers that the disciples could not be drunken, because it was only the third hour of the day (about 9:00 A.M.). This was the first of the Jews' three daily prayer hours (Psalm 55:17; Daniel 6:10), and even the most intemperate of them never drank wine before this early prayer hour.

After Peter had shown the unreasonableness of the mockers' accusation, he interpreted, by inspiration of the Holy Ghost, the manifestation they had just witnessed as the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28-29). Joel had prophesied that in the last days (last dispensation) God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh (all nations and races of people). The salvation God foreordained for men through the sacrifice of Christ was prophesied of in detail in the Old Testament, but these prophecies could not be fully understood until they were fulfilled. And even then, their spiritual significance was only revealed by inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

Jeremiah prophesied that God would make a new covenant with His people, by which He would write His laws in their hearts and minds (Jeremiah 31:31-34), enabling them to obey His laws. And Paul interpreted his prophecy as fulfilled in the outpouring of the Holy Ghost (Hebrews 8:7-13; 9:1-15).

But perhaps Ezekiel's prophecy of this new experience in Christ was the most clearly stated. He said, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes,

## *Acts*

and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them” (Ezekiel 36:26-27). The Mosaic covenant of law could not make men righteous because of the weakness of carnal flesh (Romans 7:18-25; Hebrews 8:7-8). But God provided for men a new birth into new spiritual life through redemption in Christ. The law could not produce righteousness because it could not give life (Galatians 3:21), but what the law could not do, God provided for us through the gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:1-4; II Corinthians 5:17; Hebrews 7:19). The apostle Paul testified of his new birth in Christ, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

### **David’s Prophecy Fulfilled**

(Verses 22-31)

After Peter explained that the disciples’ joy and speaking in other tongues was the manifestation of God’s Holy Spirit which had been poured out in fulfillment of prophecy, he emphasized that the Spirit had come from the resurrected Jesus. He reminded the people that Jesus had proven His deity by the miracles He had performed during His earthly ministry. He had challenged the Jews to believe for His works’ sake (John 10:36-38; 14:7-11). And now by pouring out His Spirit on the disciples He proved that although they had crucified Him He was alive forevermore.

Jesus’ death on the cross (to atone for the sins of men) was by the foreordination and determinate will of God, but this fact did not lessen the guilt of those who

crucified Him. By wicked hands they had killed Him, but God had raised Him up from the dead. It was not possible for the perfect Son of God (I Peter 2:21-24) to be held in death, which is the wages of sin (Romans 6:23). Because He was perfect, He could die in our place and come forth to give to us eternal life. And, in scriptural substantiation, Peter interpreted David's prophecy of the resurrection of Christ.

David is not classed as one of the prophets, but many of his Psalms were prophetic. He gave some of the most important prophecies of the Christ, many of which seemed to stem from his own experiences. His prophecy of the resurrection of Christ (Psalm 16:8-10) was given as if he spoke of himself. But Peter explained that he could not have spoken of himself, since he had been dead and buried for many years. He spoke of Christ who was to come of his own lineage. It was the promised Son of David (Psalm 89:3-4, 19-27; 132:11) whose soul would not be left in hell nor His flesh see corruption.

The full truth of the death and resurrection of Christ, as prophesied by David, is confirmed in the New Testament. Before He ascended up far above all heavens, He first descended into the lower parts of the earth, which was the abode of wicked spirits (Ephesians 4:9-10). And Peter said that by means of His death (on the cross) He went and preached to those spirits in prison which had been disobedient in the days of Noah (I Peter 3:18-20). It was not enough for Christ to die a physical death, but it was necessary for Him to pay the full penalty for our sins, which was the death of the condemned and forsaken of God (Psalm 22:1; Matthew 27:46). Jesus went into hell (Hades) for us, but because He had no sin He could not

be held there. He came forth with the keys to death and hell (Revelation 1:17-18). He came forth victorious over death, hell and the grave and took the sting out of physical death for all who will believe and obey His gospel (I Corinthians 15:50-57).

### **The Accomplishment of Jesus' Death and Resurrection**

(Verses 32-36)

Peter was able, by personal knowledge, to witness to the resurrection of Jesus. It was most important that the first preaching of the gospel, by which the foundation of the church should be laid, should include an eyewitness account of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And for this purpose the Lord appeared after His resurrection to His disciples whom He had chosen as apostles and to many others who also should confirm the fact that He was alive (I Corinthians 15:1-10). And after bearing witness by first-hand knowledge that Jesus was indeed alive from the dead, Peter witnessed to the accomplishment of His death, resurrection, and ascension.

By Jesus' death, He atoned for men's sins; by His resurrection, He won the right to bestow on them the gift of eternal life. And He ascended on high to pour out the Holy Ghost, which is an earnest of the inheritance of eternal life (Ephesians 1:13-14), on all flesh. The multitude of Jews who had come to the Temple in Jerusalem on this day were seeing and hearing the manifestation of the Holy Ghost which had been shed forth on the one hundred and twenty disciples. Jesus, whom they had condemned as the most dangerous criminal and had crucified, was proven to be both Lord (Jehovah) and Christ by

this evidence of His resurrection (Romans 1:3-4).

Isaiah prophesied of Him that when the Lord JEHOVAH should become the salvation of men, they would draw water with joy out of the wells of salvation and sing praises to Him (Isaiah 12:1-6). The angel told Joseph that His name should be called JESUS (Jehovah-Savior), for He should save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). And, in saving them from sin, He gave them hope of eternal life (John 6:40; 11:25; II Corinthians 4:14; 5:1). He was delivered to die on the cross for our offences and raised up from the dead for our justification (Romans 4:25). Jesus, by His death and resurrection, bought back our inheritance of eternal life which had been lost in Adam. And, along with the gift of eternal life, He has given us many fringe benefits which we may enjoy in this mortal life (Matthew 19:27-29; I Timothy 4:8; II Peter 1:3-4).

### **The Requirements of the Gospel**

(Verses 37-41)

Faith comes by hearing the gospel message (Romans 10:13-17), and with faith comes conviction of sin. When the people believed Peter's gospel message, they became conscious of their guilt and asked the apostles what they should do (to obtain forgiveness for their sins). Godly sorrow works repentance (II Corinthians 7:9-10). But some who feel conviction refuse to repent, and harden their hearts in willful unbelief (Acts 5:29-33; 7:54). The gospel opens the door of repentance to sinners, but those who harden their hearts against it will bring on themselves the righteous judgment of God (Romans 2:4-5). But the penitent will find mercy and forgiveness (Psalm

*Acts*

34:18; 51:17; Isaiah 66:2).

Peter obeyed Jesus' commission when he told the penitents to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus had commissioned the disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. And He promised that the signs of casting out devils, speaking with new tongues, miracles, and divine healing should follow those who believed and were baptized (Mark 16:15-20). In obedience to this commission, Peter required those who asked what they should do, to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins, and promised that they should receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

The gospel of our salvation is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (I Corinthians 15:1-4). There is no other means by which men may be saved. The only sacrifice for sin that God will accept is that which was made by the perfect Son of God on the cross of Calvary for our sins, in our stead. His burial also was essential. But if He had not come forth in the resurrection, we would still be in our sins (I Corinthians 15:16-23).

The full redemptive transaction of the Lord Jesus Christ was essential for our salvation. And He requires that we obey His gospel by identifying ourselves with Him in its full transaction. We die with Christ by repentance, which is a complete turning away from the old life of sin. Then we must signify this death by being buried with Him in water baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we come forth with Him to walk in the new life of the Holy Ghost (Romans 6:1-4). By this transaction we are made new creatures in Christ (II Corinthians 5:17). We are reconciled to God by the death of Jesus and saved by

His resurrection life (Romans 5:10). The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of God and of Christ (John 14:17; Romans 8:9; I John 4:13). And when we receive the Holy Ghost, we receive a portion of the Spirit of Jesus and become partakers of His divine nature (II Peter 1:4).

Peter told the Jews on the Day of Pentecost that the promise of the Holy Ghost was for them and their children and to all those afar off (Gentiles who had been aliens from the covenant privileges of Israel—Ephesians 2:11-13). The Spirit-filled life is God's covenant with His spiritual people of the church dispensation (Hebrews 8:6-13; 10:16-22).

The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (John 1:17). Jesus said, "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it" (Luke 16:16). The law was for the people of Israel, the natural descendants of Abraham, but the new covenant is for God's spiritual kingdom which is composed of those of faith out of all nations and races of people.

This covenant, under which the Lord fills His people with His Spirit and speaks through them in other tongues, was not just for the early church but for all people of faith to the end of the church age. There is no scriptural indication that the anointing of the Holy Ghost, with the initial sign of speaking in other tongues, should cease until Jesus returns to catch away His church. The infilling of the Holy Ghost constitutes the church. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (I Corinthians 12:13). This body, which is called the body of Christ, is the church



*Acts*

(Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18).

The full text of Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost was not recorded, but that part which contained the full truth of the gospel was recorded. He exhorted the people with many other words (unrecorded) to take advantage of the gospel invitation to save themselves from this untoward (wayward; stubborn) generation. And his preaching was so successful that about three thousand were converted on that first day of the outpouring of the Holy Ghost.

In the last six verses of this chapter Luke pictured a true Pentecostal church. The converts steadfastly obeyed the apostles' doctrine or teaching. They manifested true unity and fellowship in the breaking of bread and in prayer. This reference to the breaking of bread probably meant the ordinance of the communion service (Matthew 26:26-29; I Corinthians 11:23-26), since it was mentioned in connection with prayers. Signs and wonders (miracles) were performed by the prayers and laying on of hands by the apostles. And the spirit of brotherly love was so prevalent that the Spirit-filled saints voluntarily sold their possessions of houses and lands and put the money into a common treasury, to be dispensed equally among all as they had need. The breaking of bread from house to house likely referred to their eating their meals together, in which they rejoiced together with true fellowship and the joy of the Holy Ghost. And through the manifestation of God's Holy Spirit in His people, the body of Christ made increase of itself (Ephesians 4:16) as many souls were added to the church daily.

# Chapter 3

## **The Lame Man Healed**

(Verses 1-11)

Peter and John were routinely observing the Jews' third daily prayer hour when they went to the Temple to pray at the ninth hour (3:00 P.M.). The lame man who was carried daily to the Gate Beautiful to beg was doubtless a familiar sight to them. And evidently they had not anticipated his healing as they approached the gate on this particular afternoon. But being filled with the Holy Ghost, they were prepared for any situation the Lord might lead them into (Romans 8:14). Having their feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:15), they were always prepared for any work the Lord had for them to do. This is what is meant by being instant in season and out of season (II Timothy 4:2).

God's ministers should be always prepared to minister His gospel at any time and in any place to hungry and needy souls. Those who are only prepared to minister in formal places of worship and at regular and announced hours will miss many opportunities to win lost souls to

## *Acts*

the Lord. It was most fortunate for Saul of Tarsus that the Lord had in the city of Damascus a man named Ananias who was dedicated to His service and prepared to minister to the need at hand (Acts 9:10-18).

Because Peter and John were wholly dedicated and led of God's Spirit, their routine practice on this day turned into a most unusual happening. As they were about to enter through the Gate Beautiful into the Temple courts, the lame man asked alms of them just as he did of all who passed by. And suddenly, by divine inspiration, their attention was riveted on him. They doubtless had often passed him here and had tossed coins into his cup. But on this occasion they saw him, by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, not as a beggar but as a poor cripple in need of a healing touch by the Lord Jesus Christ. To them he was no longer a casual beggar but a lost soul for whom Jesus died and rose again to redeem.

The lame man had not yet looked at Peter and John. The business of begging was so mechanical with him that he had no interest in the hundreds of people who passed by daily except to receive something from them. So, to get his attention, Peter asked him to look up. He then looked at Peter and John, expecting to receive a coin. The apostles had neither silver nor gold on this occasion but they had that which this man needed far more than he needed silver and gold. They not only had the wealth of the blessing of the Holy Ghost in their own lives, but they had the faith and anointing to dispense God's blessing of healing to this needy cripple.

Peter did not act on his own but as the Lord's representative when he told the man to rise up and walk. And by faith he took him by the hand to lift him up. The man,

at this point, did not have faith to make an attempt to stand but Peter's lifting him by the hand signified that God would do for him what he could not do for himself.

As Peter lifted him up, he found that he had strength in his ankles to stand; and when he realized he could stand, he began to walk and leap for joy. Isaiah's prophecy that the lame man should leap as a hart (deer) was literally fulfilled (Isaiah 35:6). We may better understand this man's demonstration of wild joy when we consider the miracle that happened so suddenly to him. He was more than forty years old (Acts 4:22) and had never walked, for he was lame from birth. But he would no longer need to be carried to sit at the gate of the Temple and beg for his living. He could now walk like other people and live a normal life. And the very wonder of this instantaneous miracle overwhelmed him.

The physical healing of the lame man was a symbol of the spiritual healing that every spiritually sick and crippled sinner may receive from the Lord. His physical deliverance was a picture of the deliverance of those who are lifted out of the beggarly elements of the world and made to walk in righteousness (Galatians 4:9). The spiritually sick and diseased may be delivered from the darkness of sin and translated into the light of God's kingdom of righteousness (Colossians 1:13; I Peter 2:9).

This outstanding miracle could not be denied or explained away. The lame beggar was well known to the people of Jerusalem. His sitting beside the gate Beautiful begging had been a familiar sight for many years. And when they saw him walking and leaping and praising God, they were astonished and excited. The news of this phenomenon spread rapidly through the city, and soon

## *Acts*

great crowds of people gathered to see what was taking place. And they were amazed to see the man whom they knew to have been lame all his life now standing with Peter and John in Solomon's Porch and clinging to them in a show of gratitude and affection for what they had ministered to him.

The impediments which sin has brought on the human race cannot be removed by the physical efforts of men. Only the miraculous power of God can fully restore the diseased in soul and body. The medical profession can patch up diseased and crippled bodies and, by modern surgery, has been able to transplant substitutes for some diseased organs of the human body. But they cannot make a man whole as God created him in the first place. That can only be accomplished by the miraculous power of God. And neither can religion and theology and philosophy patch up the diseased and warped souls and minds of men. Only God, by the means of the new birth of His Spirit, can re-create men into new creatures in righteousness and true holiness.

### **Peter's Second Sermon**

(Verses 12-26)

The miracle of the healing of the lame man was the occasion for Peter's second sermon. The preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, to be effective, must be demonstrated by works. God's promises are not mere words alone but are backed up by the power of the Holy Ghost. The miraculous demonstration of His presence with the people of Israel caused the heathen nations to fear the God of Israel (Psalm 114:1-8). And only by the demonstration of the Holy Ghost can God's saints become effec-

tive in the evangelization of the world. The apostle Paul determined that his preaching should not be with enticing words of men's wisdom but in the demonstration of the Holy Ghost, that men's faith should not depend on the wisdom of men but on the power of God (I Corinthians 2:1-5). When the apostles and ministers of the early church went forth with the gospel, the Lord worked with them, confirming His Word with signs following (Mark 16:19-20). And Peter took full advantage of this miracle of healing to preach the gospel of Jesus to the wondering multitude.

When the people saw this man suddenly begin to walk and leap, they were forced to acknowledge that a great miracle had been performed. But, according to human nature, they were more prone to attribute the miracle to some mysterious ability of the apostles than to the power of God. If Peter and John had been willing to accept their homage, they doubtless would have been highly honored and exalted and perhaps worshiped. But many of those who were willing to honor Peter and John were not willing to give this honor to Jesus and turned away to persecute. However, Peter made it very plain that he and John had not healed the man but were only instruments through whom God worked.

Perhaps we would see more miracles performed today if God's ministers and saints were humble enough to give Him all the glory. We need the spirit of John the Baptist who said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). We cannot exalt the Lord if we exalt the flesh. God will not give His glory to another (Isaiah 42:8).

Peter used this most opportune experience to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ and preach His gospel of salvation.

## *Acts*

Every sermon recorded in Acts had for its theme the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is His death, burial, and resurrection (I Corinthians 15:1-4).

The central proclamation of this, Peter's second sermon, was that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the same God that the Jews professed to worship, had raised up and glorified His Son Jesus whom they had demanded to be crucified when the Roman governor Pilate sought to release Him. They had denied the Holy and Just One who was the promised Messiah of Old Testament prophecy and had rather chosen the release of Barabbas, who was an insurrectionist and a murderer (Mark 15:7-15; Luke 23:13-25). Peter boldly told them they had killed the Prince of life but that God had raised Him up from the dead and, through faith in His name, the lame man had been completely healed. Again, in no uncertain tones, Peter witnessed to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, not only because he had seen Him alive after He arose but also because he had received the Holy Ghost sent from Him (John 14:16-20; 16:7).

Peter laid the guilt for the crucifixion of Christ at the door of the Jews who had clamored for His crucifixion, but he then opened to them the door of repentance through the message of the gospel of Jesus. He made allowance for their ignorance of the true identity of Jesus. Some of the rulers of the Jews (members of the Sanhedrin) had, in ignorance of the deity of Jesus, acquiesced to His crucifixion, and the common people had blindly followed their leadership. Now those who had honestly thought He was an imposter could, by repentance, obtain mercy from God. Said of Tarsus obtained mercy because he had honestly, but in ignorance, sinned

against the Lord Jesus and His church. He testified, "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief" (I Timothy 1:12-13). Jesus taught that those who blaspheme against the Holy Ghost can find no forgiveness (Matthew 12:31-32). He said one might, in ignorance of His true identity, speak against the Son of man and be forgiven; but he who, in full knowledge and open rebellion, spoke against the undeniable work of God's Holy Spirit, committed the unpardonable sin and left himself liable to eternal judgment.

The Jews, whether they acted sincerely or insincerely, were guilty of the death of Jesus, and it was necessary for them to feel their guilt before they could repent. God used the traitorous act of Judas, the unbelief and rebellion of the Jews, and the weakness of Pilate to fulfill His eternal plan of salvation for men through the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ. And only on the basis of His substitutionary death and resurrection could Peter call these guilty men to repent and be converted (turn from their evil way). But he promised if they would repent, their sins should be blotted out, and their souls refreshed by the presence of God's Holy Spirit.

Peter went on to promise those who repented and were converted an eternal reward when Jesus should return from heaven to consummate the full redemption of men and to destroy all wickedness. God had opened his understanding to Old Testament prophecy. And he showed that God had foretold, through many different prophets, the full scope of men's salvation, which began



## *Acts*

with the coming of the Holy Ghost and will conclude with their translation into immortality. He showed that Jesus Christ, who accomplished this full, complete, and eternal salvation for men, was that Prophet whom God promised to raise up like unto Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-19).

The Old Testament prophets revealed also that the salvation provided for men through Christ would be offered to the whole world. There was to come one seed (descendant) of Abraham through whom all families of the earth should be blessed (Genesis 12:3; 22:15-18; Galatians 3:8, 16; Ephesians 2:11-22). But these promises were made through the prophets of Israel to the nation of Israel, out of which was to come the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world.

Jesus, the Word made flesh, came to His own after the flesh (the nation of Israel), and His own received Him not (John 1:11-13). He came into the world which He had created, but the world did not know Him (John 1:10). But He made possible eternal life through the way of faith to men of all nations. Jesus, after the flesh, came from the nation of Israel; and He offered His new covenant, the way of eternal salvation, first to the people of Israel who, by reason of their heritage in Abraham, were heirs of the covenant of promise (Romans 9:4-5; Hebrews 6:17). Many individually accepted Christ, and the early church was almost wholly made up of the people of Israel. But Israel as a nation, along with their ruling body, refused Him, and He sent His ministers out of Jerusalem to carry His gospel to all nations of the world.

# Chapter 4

## **The First Persecution**

(Verses 1-4)

The apostles' first persecution came as the result of the healing of the lame man. The ruling body of the Jews (Sanhedrin) used this occurrence as an excuse to attack them, but they were already incensed against them because they preached the resurrection of Jesus. The preaching of the resurrection cut them deeply because they were responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus. The chief priests had influenced the common people to cry to Pilate to crucify Jesus and release to them Barabbas (Mark 15:6-15). And when Pilate tried to avoid guilt for His crucifixion by washing his hands, they had said, "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matthew 27:24-25).

Now these religious leaders were losing their influence over the people who believed the apostles' preaching that Jesus had been raised from the dead and were being condemned of them as guilty of murder. So when Peter preached that the lame man was healed by Jesus,

## *Acts*

whom God had raised from the dead, they were deeply grieved and determined to stop the work and the preaching of the apostles. While Peter was yet preaching, they sent officers who arrested him and John and put them in hold (prison), where they were kept overnight. But their persecutors were to learn that they could not stop the work of the Holy Ghost by imprisoning the preachers.

God did not permit the arrest of Peter and John until Peter had preached the full gospel message of salvation to the curious crowd that gathered to see the lame man who was now healed. It appears that about five thousand out of this crowd believed and were converted by the influence of the miracle and Peter's gospel sermon. The ministry of the apostles was proven to be of God by the miraculous demonstrations of the Holy Ghost, and the efforts of those who fought against it were futile.

When Paul was a prisoner in Rome, he wrote to Timothy that although he suffered trouble as an evil doer, even unto bonds, the Word of God was not bound (II Timothy 2:9). During his first imprisonment in Rome he was permitted, by the intervention of God, to live in his own hired house and preach to all who came to him (Acts 28:16-31). And he wrote to the Philippians, "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel" (Philippians 1:12). He willingly suffered these adversities because he recognized that they were being used of God to spread His gospel.

Surely Peter and John were also happy to spend a night in prison in order to see five thousand people converted to the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **The Trial of Peter and John**

(Verses 5-14)

On the morning following the arrest of Peter and John, the rulers of the Jews called a special session of their religious court to try them. They met with the determination to condemn the apostles and stop them from preaching in the name of Jesus. They charged them with acting without authority in performing the healing of the lame man. They considered themselves to be the sole authority in all religious matters. And they maintained that any religious work practiced, or any doctrine preached, without their authority should be condemned and stopped, and the propagators of such be punished. They considered it to be a crime for anyone to refuse to submit to the authority of the priests, elders, and scribes who represented the religious learning and rule of the Jews. The scribes were the interpreters of the Scriptures, and the high priest, with the other priests and elders, constituted the authority in all their religious matters.

Peter, as usual, was the spokesman in this trial. And he again took the opportunity to preach Jesus Christ. Without hesitancy he gave a direct answer to the rulers' questioning of apostolic authority. He emphasized that he and John were not being examined (tried) for a crime but for the good deed done to the impotent man. And they had the man who was healed present with them as their chief witness (verses 10, 14). Perhaps the rulers remembered that Jesus had asked, on one occasion, for which of His good works had the Jews sought to stone Him (John 10:30-33). Peter then testified that by the power and authority of the name of Jesus Christ, whom they had crucified, but whom God had raised from the dead, the man

## *Acts*

who had been lame from birth was now standing before them whole. And this miracle was evidence of the resurrection of Jesus and of His power. Peter interpreted another Old Testament prophecy which condemned these men who refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah of prophecy. They had set at nought the Stone of their salvation who was typified by the stone from which flowed water in the desert (Exodus 17:5-6; I Corinthians 10:1-4). But God had made Him the head corner Stone of His house (Psalm 118:22; Ephesians 2:20-22; I Peter 2:6-9).

Peter further proclaimed that there was no other means of salvation and no other name given whereby men could be saved. They must accept Jesus as the fulfillment of every Old Testament promise of salvation or be eternally damned. He was the One of whom Isaiah prophesied, "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation" (Isaiah 12:2).

The Lord Jehovah became our salvation in Jesus, whose name means "Jehovah-Savior" (Matthew 1:21-23). Every knee must eventually bow to His name, and every tongue must confess that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11). All the fulness of God was revealed in the man Christ Jesus who came to earth to redeem men from sin (Colossians 1:15-19; 2:9, 10; II Corinthians 5:18-19; I Timothy 3:16). The Word was made flesh (John 1:1, 14). Isaiah said of this Son of God (Galatians 4:4) that His name should be called "Wonderful, Counseller, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

The rulers who sat to condemn God's apostles were themselves condemned of God's Word given through

these Spirit-filled men. They were made to marvel at the boldness of these men whom they looked upon as prisoners at their mercy. This was not the same Peter who a few weeks before had, in fear, denied his Lord (Luke 22:54-62). And this was not the same John who had wanted to call fire from heaven to consume the Samaritans who refused to entertain Jesus and His disciples (Luke 9:51-56), and who had carnally asked for the first place in the kingdom (Mark 10:35-45). They had been made new creatures in Christ Jesus (II Corinthians 5:17) and were now boldly proclaiming His gospel by the power of the Holy Ghost. They had made their defense that of the gospel rather than of themselves (Philippians 1:17).

These uneducated fishermen whom Jesus had called from the sea of Galilee to become fishers of men were looked upon as ignorant and unlearned by the educated priests and scribes and rabbis. But their persecutors were forced to acknowledge that they had been taught of Jesus, of whom one said, "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" (John 7:15). The apostles had sat at the feet of Him who not only was the author of the Word of God but was Himself the living Word. He is the source of all wisdom and knowledge (Isaiah 11:2; I Corinthians 1:24; Colossians 2:3). And the rulers were left speechless before the boldness of the apostles, with the man who was healed, as evidence of their claim, standing with them in the court.

### **The Verdict of the Trial**

(Verses 15-22)

After Peter made his able defense, the prisoners were sent out of the room while the council, as the jury, sought

## *Acts*

to reach a verdict in the case. But as they conferred among themselves, they were forced to acknowledge that they could not deny this remarkable miracle before the people. And since they had no other charge against them, they could not impose a sentence without incurring the animosity of multitudes who were genuinely impressed by the miracles and preaching of the apostles. But they sought to intimidate them in an attempt to check the spread of their work and doctrine. They called them back and threatened them with further punishment if they continued to speak and teach in the name of Jesus.

Peter and John, conscious of the presence of the Lord in the Holy Ghost, were not afraid of their threats. Being thoroughly committed to fulfill the commission of the Lord Jesus, they challenged the rulers to judge for themselves whether it was right to obey men rather than God. They boldly told the court they could do nothing less than preach and teach the revelation of the gospel which they had received from the Lord. They demonstrated the same spirit in which the Hebrew children had answered Nebuchadnezzar, that whether or not God saw fit to deliver them, they would not serve his gods or bow down to his image (Daniel 3:16-18).

So the rulers could only threaten them and let them go. They did not release them from any sense of justice but only from fear of impugment by the people. They were prevented from their evil designs by the sentiment of the masses who believed in the miracle they had seen and glorified God for it. The healing of this man who had been lame for more than forty years could not be denied. And, sooner or later, all men must learn that it is futile to fight against the power of God.

**A Pentecostal Prayer Meeting**  
(Verses 23-31)

As soon as Peter and John were released, they rejoined the company of the newly born-again saints of God, with whom they were now kindred, both in doctrine and experience. They had all been baptized into the body of Christ by the same Spirit (I Corinthians 12:13). They reported to the disciples all the proceedings and the outcome of their trial. And the reaction of these Spirit-filled saints was to lift up their voices together to praise and magnify the Lord. Their faith was strengthened in the knowledge that the great God who had created all things had been mindful of His servants to deliver them from their persecutors.

Jesus had told the disciples that when the Holy Ghost came He would teach them the things of God and bring to their remembrance the things He had taught them (John 14:26). And since the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit had been unfolding to them the interpretation and fulfillment of Old Testament Scriptures. In every move of the Spirit they were able to discern the fulfillment of some prophetic passage.

They now recognized in this persecution, which was directed against the Lord within His people, the fulfillment of David's prophecy that the heathen and the people of Israel and kings and rulers would band together in their fight against Christ. They remembered that king Herod and the Roman governor Pilate, with both Gentiles and Israelites, had been responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus. The fact that God used their attitudes and actions to fulfill His plan of redemption did not lessen their guilt. But the Christians' recognition that the Lord had foretold



## *Acts*

the persecution of Christ and His people was great encouragement to them. They perhaps remembered that Jesus had told them they would be persecuted, as was their Lord and Master (John 15:18-21).

In the disciples' prayer they simply and faithfully committed the threats of their enemies to the Lord. Perhaps they remembered how Hezekiah had spread the threatening letter of Sennacherib before the Lord, who had sent Isaiah with a comforting message of deliverance (Isaiah 37:10-38). And now, in the assurance that they had been called of the Lord to preach His gospel (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-20; Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:8), they faithfully left the matter of their persecutors in His hands. It is worthy of note that they did not ask to be delivered from persecution but only for boldness to speak God's Word in spite of persecution. They prayed that the Lord would continue to work in them to heal and to show signs and wonders by the power of the name of Jesus Christ. And as they prayed, God answered by giving them a fresh refilling of the Holy Ghost in such power that the very building was shaken where they prayed. This was truly a Pentecostal prayer meeting. It was not merely the noise of emotional shouting but the mighty move of God's Spirit upon them, as evidenced by the power with which they went forth to preach His word.

### **Having All Things Common**

(Verses 32-37)

The first and most important fruit and manifestation of the Spirit of God is love (Galatians 5:22). Jesus said that the first and great commandment was to love the Lord with all one's heart, soul, mind, and strength; and

the second was to love one's neighbor as himself (Mark 12:29-31). He said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). God is love, and those who have His Spirit within must necessarily love Him first and one another second (I John 4:7-16).

The love of God, which was shed abroad in the hearts of the disciples by the Holy Ghost (Romans 5:5), was demonstrated in the early church. It was demonstrated to the extent that they voluntarily sold their possessions of houses and lands and put all the proceeds into a common treasury, from which the needs of all were supplied (Acts 2:44-45). The apostles were the custodians of this common treasury. God did not command His people to do this, nor did the apostles suggest it. But the practice was born of the very generous impulse generated by the love of God which they had received in the Holy Ghost. The Spirit-filled saints felt so closely bound together by the Spirit of God that they desired to share all their personal possessions with one another. And, for a time, they lived as one family.

The spirit of this move was right, but the practice soon became impractical. God's people are bound together into one body, or one family, of which Jesus is the head (I Corinthians 12:12-13). And there should be no schism or division in the body, but each member should love every other member as himself and manifest love in caring for all those who need care (I Corinthians 12:25-26; Romans 12:15). When one member of the body of Christ suffers, all the members should be so closely knit in the Spirit that they will sympathetically suffer with him. And when one member is honored or blessed, all the

## *Acts*

members should rejoice with him. But the practice of having a common treasury from which all the members were supplied materially did not work out as intended and could not endure when the members became scattered into all parts of the world.

In the conclusion of this chapter a man was introduced who was to become a very important evangelist in the Gentile world. A great deal concerning his character was revealed in a very few words. His name was Joses, but the apostles surnamed him Barnabas, the meaning of which was son of consolation. They doubtless called him by this name because it described his character. His subsequent history proved that he had great love and interest in humanity and gave himself to serve the needs of people, both physical and spiritual. His lineage was from the tribe of Levi, which was the tribe God chose to serve in the spiritual affairs of the nation of Israel. But Barnabas was an Israelite of the dispersion. He was a native of the island of Cyprus, which is located in the Mediterranean off the western coast of Syria and Lebanon. And he, along with many others, and in keeping with his character, sold his land and brought the price of it to the apostles to be put into the common treasury for the benefit of the whole group of Christians.

# Chapter 5

## **God's Judgment of Hypocrisy**

(Verses 1-11)

The sin of Ananias and Sapphira grew out of the practice in the early church of having a common treasury from which all the members shared alike. Perhaps it was the act of the beloved and respected Barnabas, who brought the price of his land to the apostles, that influenced them to sell their land and contribute to the common fund. They desired to be honored for also having generously sacrificed their possessions for the benefit of the church, but their desire was for the praise of men more than for the praise of God (John 12:42-43).

This attitude is the seed of hypocrisy. If Ananias and Sapphira had been motivated by the love of God, they would have sought only to please the Lord in service to their fellow Christians. Because they thought more of themselves than either the Lord or His saints, they were unwilling to give all the price of their land but were too proud to admit their lack of generosity. They belonged to the company of disciples, and had evidently received the

## *Acts*

Holy Ghost, but had grown cold in their experience, so that the carnal nature of covetousness and pride had become the ruling force in their lives. They desired the same honor and privileges of the other disciples but were unwilling to make the same consecration that the others made. So they agreed together to bring only a part of the price of their land to the apostles but to pretend that they brought the full price.

The love of God fills the hearts of all who receive the Holy Ghost (Romans 5:5), for God is love (I John 4:8, 16). But to continue to be filled with His love, one must continue to draw daily from the source of love and life. He who fails to do this will again become carnally, or naturally minded, and the old nature of selfishness will again influence his attitudes and actions. When the Corinthian Christians became carnal they were torn by envy, strife, and divisions (I Corinthians 3:1-3). Carnality is the basic cause of all troubles within the church, as well as in the individual lives of Christians. If we fail to live by the power of Christ within, we shall be overcome of the carnal nature (Romans 8:5-13; 12:21; I John 5:4), and the old spirit of lust and pride will again rule our thinking and actions.

Pride in religion is most damaging to spirituality. When one desires to be thought spiritual and pious but is unwilling to pay the price of death to self, by which true spirituality comes, he becomes hypocritical.

This was the condition of the religious leaders of the Jews in the time of Christ and of the early church. The Pharisees and scribes demanded meticulous observance of the ceremonial law of Moses and of the many traditions of the elders, but Jesus said of them, "all their works they

do for to be seen of men” (Matthew 23:5). He indicted them for binding heavy burdens on the people—in a show of piety—burdens which they themselves would not put forth a finger to lift. They loved the uppermost rooms at feasts, the chief seats in the synagogues, and to be greeted as Rabbi in the public market places. They made long prayers for show but, in covetousness, robbed widows of their houses. Jesus called them whited sepulchres which appeared beautiful on the outside but within were full of corruption (Matthew 23:6-28).

This carnal ambition for religious supremacy and the praise of men brought them into sharp conflict with Jesus and with the apostolic preaching of His gospel. And the emptiness and powerlessness of their hypocritical profession was in sharp contrast to the apostles’ true sincerity and power of an inward possession.

Ananias and Sapphira were not commanded to sell their land or to bring the price of it to the apostles. Peter said, “Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?” They did so purely for the sake of appearance, because others were doing it. They were not condemned for giving only a part of the price of their land and would not have been condemned if they had given no part of it. But they were judged because they dishonestly represented the amount they gave as being the full price they had received. Their hypocrisy grew out of pride and covetousness. In pride, they wanted the praise of men; but, in covetousness, they wanted to keep the price of the land for themselves. They attempted to deceive Peter and the other apostles but forgot that God knows the thoughts and intents of the heart and was able to reveal the secrets of their hearts to His

## *Acts*

apostles. Ananias was not dealing with Peter as a man but with God who possessed and used Peter. And he learned, to his sorrow, that all things are naked and open before God (Hebrews 4:13). Peter told him that he had sinned by the instigation of Satan. While he pretended to worship the Lord, the devil had used him to wreck his own soul and to try to hinder the work of God in others.

God chose to make a test case of the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. Their immediate and severe judgment was intended as a somber warning to all the saints who had recently been filled with the Holy Ghost. Peter was given discernment, by the Holy Ghost, of the thoughts and intents of their hearts, and he brought their sin, which they thought was well hidden, out into the open.

God does not always publicly uncover the sins of men, but there are occasions when this is necessary for the good of His people and His cause. His severe judgment of Achan and all that pertained to him was to prevent the whole nation of Israel from being contaminated by the sin of covetousness (Joshua 7:1-26). And His severe judgment of Ananias and Sapphira was to prevent the early church from being contaminated by the sin of hypocrisy. The judgment of Ananias and Sapphira caused the saints of the early church to fear God and, no doubt, prevented many false professions of faith. It also demonstrated God's wrath against hypocrisy and evidenced that all hypocrites who fail to repent must eventually pay the penalty of eternal death in hell. Death is the wages of sin (Romans 6:23). God does not always immediately strike down those who lie, but all who fail to repent and accept the sacrifice of Christ must eventually pay the penalty of death for all their sins.

Jesus was compassionate toward repentant sinners. He called dishonest Zacchaeus out of the sycamore tree to bring salvation to his house (Luke 19:1-10). He told the woman who was taken in the act of adultery to go and sin no more (John 8:3-11). But He denounced the hypocritical Pharisees and scribes who shut up the kingdom of heaven against men (Matthew 23:13). They not only barred themselves from the kingdom of God, but by their hypocrisy they hindered others from going in.

It seems rather strange to us that Ananias could have died and been buried before his wife heard of it. But, due to the hot climate and lack of facilities to properly care for a corpse, it seems to have been an essential practice to bury the dead immediately. And there were men employed to take care of this business. So as soon as Ananias died the young men wound his body in grave clothes and buried him.

Three hours later Sapphira came in, and when asked by Peter if they had sold the land for so much, she assented to the same story that Ananias had told. Peter then rebuked her for her complicity in the deception and pronounced on her the same judgment that had come upon Ananias. She also fell dead, and the same young men carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

There seems to have been no lamentation over the death of these two who died by the judgment of God. But when the just and righteous Stephen was stoned to death for the Word of God, devout men carried him to his burial, and the saints made great lamentation over him (Acts 8:2).

God is just and fair in His judgment of sin. In loving mercy He judged the sins of men in Jesus, if they will appropriate the sacrifice He made. In doing so, He became



both just and the justifier of all who believe in Jesus (Romans 3:21-26). We may be sure that He will never condemn any unjustly but that all who refuse to accept the sacrifice He made must pay the penalty of eternal death for their sins. We must all die the physical death, for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (I Corinthians 15:50). But Jesus has taken the sting out of physical death for all who come to Him (I Corinthians 15:54-57). Death is gain for those who live for Christ (Philippians 1:21).

### **The Power of a Holy Church**

(Verses 12-16)

If the apostles had tolerated the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, others would have followed their example in hypocrisy, and the power of the church would have deteriorated. But the saints were solemnized by the severe judgment of these two. Many others respected and honored the disciples but were afraid to attempt to join them without a genuine experience of the Holy Ghost.

Due to an even greater upsurge of the power of the Holy Ghost working in the church, multitudes of men and women were converted to the Lord as they witnessed the miracles of healing. The people came to have such faith in the prayers of the apostles that they believed if the shadow of Peter passed over their sick ones, they would be healed. However, the apostles laid no claim to such virtue. Peter and John had made it very plain that the lame man (chapter 3) was not healed by their own power or holiness but by faith in the power of the name of Jesus (Acts 3:12-16). The number of disciples continued to grow, but the demonstration of the power of God

in the apostolic ministry brought more severe persecution from the Jews.

### **The Second Persecution**

(Verses 17-28)

The resurrection of Jesus was the pivot of apostolic preaching. If He had not risen from the dead, the apostles would have had no message, and their cause would have been a dead one. They preached that the manifestation of the Holy Ghost (speaking in other tongues, miracles, and HEALINGS) was the result of the resurrection of Christ. His Spirit now filled the disciples and worked through them.

But their message of the resurrection of Jesus, substantiated by the miraculous working of the Holy Ghost, drew animosity and strong opposition from the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes (Acts 4:1-2). This message greatly agitated the scribes and Pharisees because they had been responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus. And it grieved the Sadducees for this same reason and also because it denied their doctrine that there was no resurrection of the dead. The demonstration of the power of the Holy Ghost was strong testimony against these guilty members of the Sanhedrin because it witnessed to the resurrection of Jesus. The preaching of the resurrection of Jesus and the demonstration of the Holy Ghost in miracles and healings filled them with wrath because they realized it condemned them and put their own religious position and authority in jeopardy. So they again imprisoned the apostles and determined to stop the preaching of the gospel of Jesus in any way possible. But they were to learn that they were not fighting against men but against God.

## *Acts*

The Lord's enemies have never been able to destroy His Word or defeat His purpose. They shut up Jeremiah in prison for pronouncing judgment on Jerusalem, but the Lord instructed him to dictate his message to Baruch, who was sent to read it in the house of the Lord (Jeremiah 36:1-8). And when king Jehoiakim burned the scroll of Jeremiah's prophecy, the Lord had him dictate the same message again, with an added pronouncement of judgment against Jehoiakim for his wicked deed (Jeremiah 36:16-23, 27-32). Paul was used of the Lord to preach the gospel to rulers and kings while he was a prisoner for two years in Caesarea and another two years in Rome. He later wrote to Timothy that although he was in bonds, the Word of God was not bound (II Timothy 2:9). And on this occasion, when the council of the Jews tried to stop the preaching of the gospel by imprisoning the apostles, God opened the prison door by a miracle and sent them back to the Temple to continue preaching in the name of Jesus.

The rulers of the Jews were thoroughly frustrated when the officers who were sent to bring the apostles from prison for trial returned with the news that they found the prison securely locked, and the guards before the doors, but the prisoners not within. While they were wondering what to do about this mysterious situation, a messenger brought word that the men they had put in prison were now in the Temple teaching the people. The officers were then sent to the Temple and brought the apostles without inflicting any violence on them, for fear of being stoned by the people.

The members of the council found themselves at a decided disadvantage before these Spirit-filled men of God. They were already, by the miraculous power of God,

defeated in their purpose to condemn the apostles. They were forced to admit that, in spite of their command not to teach in the name of Jesus, these men had filled Jerusalem with their doctrine.

### **The Boldness of the Apostles**

(Verses 29-33)

It was the power of the Holy Ghost within the apostles and disciples of the early church that made them bold in the face of their persecutors. They were no longer afraid of the rulers of the Jews, for they had the God of heaven within them (John 14:20) to direct and protect them.

Peter had once denied the Lord in the presence of a servant girl, but he was now bold as a lion in the presence of these rulers. The disciples of Jesus had cowered in fear and had forsaken the Lord when He was arrested in Gethsemane. And when their group met again it was behind closed (locked) doors for fear of the Jews (John 20:19). But they were now unafraid because they knew the Lord was alive and that so long as they obeyed Him they had all the power of heaven behind them. Jesus had warned them not to fear those who only had power to kill the body but to fear Him who had power to cast into hell (Matthew 10:28). So they boldly told the council they must obey God rather than men.

When God's saints are led of His Spirit, they have His protection, and need not fear men (Hebrews 13:5-6). They may suffer persecution, and sometimes be killed, but they will not be defeated (Acts 7:59-60; 20:22-24). Because Jesus promised never to leave or forsake His people, they need not fear anything men may do. The apostles did not fear their persecutors because they knew

## *Acts*

they had the Greater of all things abiding within them (I John 4:4). But only in the assurance of His presence and power can we boldly witness to the world of the power of His gospel to save men from sin and hell.

Peter boldly told the council that the apostolic mission was to witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ, through whom men could find repentance and forgiveness of sins. The rulers, being cut to the heart (convicted), were so enraged when they realized they had been put on the defensive before these courageous and powerful men, that they lost all self-control and determined to kill them.

### **The Warning by Gamaliel** (Verses 34-42)

The Jews, in spite of their wrath, could go no further in their persecution of the apostles than the Lord permitted. On this occasion, He used Gamaliel, that great doctor of the law of Moses, under whom Saul of Tarsus studied (Acts 22:3), to hold them back from their murderous intent. Gamaliel wisely advised them that if the work of the apostles was of men, it would come to nothing of itself, but if it was of God, they could not overthrow it. He told them they should let these men alone, lest they be found to fight against God. And since, by the miraculous power of God, they had already been stopped short in their attempt to condemn the apostles, they grudgingly agreed to obey his advice. But they refused to release them till they had beaten them and again warned them not to teach in the name of Jesus.

These Spirit-filled and dedicated men took the beating and departed, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for the Lord Jesus who had suffered crucifixion for

them. Persecution could not destroy their zeal, which was fed daily from the fountainhead of the living water of God's Spirit (John 7:37-39).

Because of the apostles' personal dedication, their ministry triumphed and spread from Jerusalem to all Judea and Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the world (Acts 1:8).



# Chapter 6

## **The Need for Church Organization**

(Verses 1-4)

The seven deacons were elected to solve the second problem which arose because of the practice of the early church of having a common treasury from which the needs of all the members were supplied.

The first problem had been the instance of hypocrisy by Ananias and Sapphira, and God had disposed of that problem by sending instantaneous judgment on the guilty couple.

This second problem was of a different nature and had to be solved in an altogether different way. The practice of having all things in common had worked very well at first. But the number of disciples increased so rapidly that it soon put a tremendous burden on the apostles to minister to the needs of so many. It was inevitable that some should be missed in the daily ministrations. And when the Grecians complained against the Hebrews that their widows were being neglected, the apostles decided it was time to properly organize this business.



## *Acts*

The Grecians referred to in this Scripture were Jews of the dispersion who had been born and reared in Grecian countries and who spoke the Greek language. They were presently sojourning in Jerusalem. The Hebrews were the Jews who were natives of Palestine and spoke what was then termed the Hebrew language, although few of them spoke pure Hebrew.

Some of the Grecian Jews, even though they had come into the fellowship of the Spirit-filled church, seem to have felt somewhat excluded from some of the privileges of the saints. Perhaps a language barrier contributed to this feeling of separation. So when some of their widows were missed in the daily ministrations of food and other necessities, they imagined they were being discriminated against. Some no doubt had been neglected, but we know that it was not intentional on the part of the apostles.

When this problem was brought to their attention, they were made to realize the need for greater organization and delegation in the matter of this temporal ministry. They knew they were ordained of God to receive from Him the gospel message of salvation to give to the people, and they could not neglect this most important service to minister to the temporal needs of the disciples. So they called a special meeting of all the saints and asked them to choose (nominate) seven men from among them to be appointed over this business.

As the number of disciples increased, the need for more organization in the early church increased. More workers were needed to minister to both the spiritual and temporal needs of the people. And to effectually accomplish this, it was necessary to organize and delegate the

work. It would have been impossible for the seven deacons to personally minister to all the people, but they were elected and authorized to delegate and oversee the work.

Organization means systematic teamwork. Jesus organized the business of feeding the thousands on the two occasions when He multiplied the bread and fish. He instructed that the people should be seated on the ground in groups of fifty and one hundred. Then, as the twelve disciples passed out the bread and fish, they were able to serve every individual in each group. They could not possibly have served all the people without missing some if they had continued to mill around in the crowd. The miraculous power of God was essential to supply the food, and the organization of the people and the workers was essential for the proper distribution of the food. The same is true of the business of preaching the gospel and evangelizing the world. God must supply the spiritual food but the teamwork of an organized church is necessary to distribute it.

### **Qualifications for Deacons**

(Verse 3)

The apostles emphasized that the men chosen to serve as deacons must be of honest report (having a good reputation) and be filled with the Holy Ghost and with wisdom. It was most important that these men should have established a testimony of sincerity and honesty among the people they were to serve. And it was absolutely essential for them to be filled with the Holy Ghost and wisdom, for they could not properly minister to the needs of the people without the love and the wisdom of God. They could have passed out food without

## *Acts*

these qualifications, but food alone was not enough to meet the needs of the people. Bread alone cannot give one satisfaction in life. And if the seven deacons had served bread without a sincere feeling of love and interest in those they served, the spirit of their service would have been contrary to the spirit in which the practice of having all things common was born. God is love (I John 4:8), and those who have His Holy Spirit will be able to serve their fellowmen by His love for humanity. And the wisdom of God is one of the gifts of the Spirit (I Corinthians 12:8). Everyone who works with people for the kingdom of God certainly needs His divine wisdom.

In the later development of the New Testament church, deacons were required to be grave (sober), not double-tongued (insincere), not given to much wine, and not greedy of filthy lucre (the love of money). It was important for them to keep a pure conscience, to faithfully serve in the office to which they were elected, and to have a blameless record. Their wives also must not be given to slanderous talk but should be sober and faithful. And Paul instructed that men should not be chosen for this work until they had proven their character in these respects (I Timothy 3:8-13).

### **The First Seven Deacons**

(Verses 5-15)

The seven men unanimously chosen (evidently voted upon by the multitude of the saints) are here named, and no doubt each of them served faithfully in this office. After they were chosen, the apostles laid their hands on them and, by prayer, ordained them to this ministry. God put His blessing on this move of the church and on the

lives and ministries of the men who were chosen. The Word of God increased, since the apostles now gave all their time to prayer and the preaching of the Word. As the result, disciples were greatly multiplied, and a great company of the priests of Judaism accepted Jesus Christ and obeyed His gospel. The Word of God was further increased by the ministry of Stephen who, along with his work as a deacon, began to teach and preach the gospel.

Stephen's ministering to the saints in temporal things brought him into closer contact with the people and, thereby, seems to have stimulated his zeal for the gospel of Jesus Christ. Being full of faith and the Holy Ghost, he was moved with compassion for the spiritual needs of the people, and God began to answer his prayers by performing wonders and miracles among the people.

He not only prayed for the saints whom he served, but he preached the gospel to the multitude of unbelievers. Some of the Grecians or foreign Jews who had come to Jerusalem from various places began to dispute with him concerning his doctrine of Jesus Christ. They had been educated in their local synagogue schools and imagined themselves to be very learned in the law of Moses. But they were not able to resist or withstand the wisdom and power with which Stephen spoke. When they could not defeat him by argument, they determined to silence him by other means.

These Grecians who confronted Stephen pretended to defend the faith of their fathers, but they themselves were base and dishonest men. They hired and bribed unprincipled men to give false testimony against him and stirred up the members of the Sanhedrin, who arrested him and brought him before their council for trial. When the trial

## *Acts*

was called into session, the false witnesses testified that he had spoken blasphemous words against God, the law of Moses and the Temple. They accused him of saying that Jesus of Nazareth would destroy the Temple and change the customs of the law of Moses. Stephen, in preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, had doubtless told them that salvation was not in observance of the ceremonial law and the Temple services but through faith in Jesus Christ. And he had probably told them that Jesus had said the Temple was going to be destroyed (Matthew 24:1-2). But Jesus had not said that He would destroy it. These men twisted Stephen's words and brought false accusations against him, but God witnessed for him. As he sat before his accusers, the glory of God shone in his face so that he looked like an angel.

# Chapter 7

## **Stephen's Defense Before the Council**

(Verses 1-53)

After the false witnesses had given their testimonies against Stephen, the high priest, by a pretense to justice, asked him to answer for himself whether the charges made against him were true. But his speech before the council was designed to defend the gospel of Jesus Christ rather than himself.

His discourse, which was long, was a condensed summary of the history of Israel from the time of Abraham. In his brief resume of Israel's history, he proved three things. He showed his own wide knowledge of the law of Moses and of God's dealing with the nation of Israel, his respect for the law, and his faith in Jesus as the fulfillment of all the Messianic prophecies. He showed that the Jews owed their existence as a nation and as a religious body to the divine providence of God, who foreordained the nation of Israel and their ceremonial religious services to foreshadow His eternal plan of redemption for men in Christ. God preserved the descendants of Abraham in

## *Acts*

Egyptian slavery for more than four hundred years, finally brought them out, and gave them a national home in the land He had promised to Abraham. Their deliverance, by Moses, was wholly the initiative of God. He, who was compassionate of their afflictions, defeated Pharaoh by His own miracle-working power and delivered them from the bondage of Egypt. But He did not deliver them on account of their righteousness but rather in spite of their rebellion and disobedience.

At this point, Stephen emphasized Moses' prophecy that God would raise up a Prophet, in the future, like unto himself (verse 37). Stephen intended to prove that this prophecy (Deuteronomy 18:15-19) was fulfilled in Jesus, to whom they should hearken. He intimated that as the whole Mosaic order, and especially the deliverance from Egypt, had foreshadowed God's plan of deliverance from sin by His promised Redeemer, the rebellion of their forefathers against Moses foreshadowed their own rebellion against Jesus, who was God's promised Redeemer. The people of Israel had rebelled against God and His servants in all their generations from the time of Moses, even as they now rebelled against Jesus Christ and His servants.

The Jews had accused Stephen of blaspheming the Temple, but he showed by prophecy that God is not confined to temples made with hands (verses 49-50). He countercharged them with being stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears (in spirit and understanding). As their fathers had resisted God, they now resisted the working of the Holy Ghost. As their fathers had persecuted and killed the prophets, they now persecuted God's Spirit-filled people. And they had killed the Christ of

whom all the prophets had spoken. His final charge against them was that neither they nor their fathers had kept the law which had been given them by the disposition of angels.

At this point, his indictment of them was cut short in an outbreak of their wrath. But he had summed up all their major acts of rebellion and wickedness. He had not spoken in wrath, or with a spirit of vengeance, but by the anointing of the Holy Ghost. God had spoken through him to give His own verdict against these rebels, and when they could stand no more, they broke loose in mob violence.

### **Stephen's Martyrdom**

(Verses 54-60)

Stephen's enemies were cut to the heart (convicted) by his words, but they were blinded to the truth of his witness by their own wicked rebellion and unbelief. The veil of stubborn carnal unbelief was drawn over their hearts and minds (II Corinthians 3:13-14; 4:3-6). They had brazenly made false accusations against Stephen but were maddened by his witness to the truth. In their wrath they lost all self-control and broke into mob violence. They ground their teeth in anger as if they would literally tear him to pieces.

Stephen, however, lost sight of his persecutors as he was caught up in the Spirit into the glory of God's presence and saw Jesus standing in the place of glory and authority. Some would interpret Stephen's vision of Jesus standing on the right hand of God as signifying that He was a separate entity from God. But this statement must be interpreted in the light of all the Scriptures concerning



## *Acts*

the Godhead. Jesus does not only stand on the right hand of God (place of authority), but He is the Arm of the Lord (Isaiah 40:10, 11; 51:4-5; 53:1; 59:16; 63:5; John 12:35-41; Psalm 98:1-3). While on earth, He proved by His works that He was God manifest in the flesh (John 10:37-38; 14:7-11). He was in the Father and the Father was in Him (John 14:20; I Timothy 3:16). God who in the past had spoken through the prophets had now come to reveal Himself in His Son (Hebrews 1:1-3). And this vision was the revelation of Himself to Stephen.

These religious leaders hated Stephen because their own works were evil and his were righteous (I John 3:12-13). And when he described his vision of Jesus as the Lord of glory and the Prince of life, they stopped their ears and with a loud shout ran upon him. They dragged him out of the city and stoned him to death. Those who stoned him took off their long outer cloaks and left them to be guarded by a young man named Saul. But as Stephen was being stoned, he prayed for his enemies that God would not lay this sin to their charge. He then asked the Lord to receive his spirit and was received into that glory world of which he had just had a vision.

Stephen's enemies were unwilling for him to live in this world, but heaven was ready to receive him, and he was ready for heaven, being more akin to heaven than to this world. Death must come soon or later to all God's saints, as well as to all mortals. That day does not come to all as suddenly and violently as it did to Stephen, but it is coming just as surely. And we will need the same faith and Spirit that kept him calm and serene in the midst of such violence. He was expendable for the cause of God. His ministry was short, but it was very effective and successful.

The young man, Saul of Tarsus, who kept the cloaks of those who stoned him, by which act he indicated his own sanction of the stoning, was himself converted to Jesus a short time later. He heard Stephen's defense of the gospel of Jesus Christ and his prayer for his enemies and saw the glory of God on his face and was unable to forget that scene and the words which he heard. He tried to run away from and to fight against the conviction of the Holy Ghost but God was able to apprehend him just outside the city of Damascus where he was going to persecute the Christians. And Stephen's ministry was extended in the great ministry of Saul of Tarsus who became the apostle Paul.



# Chapter 8

## **Saul's Campaign of Persecution** (Verses 1-3)

After the death of Stephen, Saul persecuted the church with greater fury than ever. He became a ringleader in a wave of persecution that drove many Christians out of Jerusalem. He went from house to house, arrested the saints and had them thrown into prison. He had not thrown the stones that killed Stephen, but by holding the cloaks of those who stoned him, he gave full consent to his martyrdom and was as guilty of his murder as those who killed him.

Saul was very zealous for the law of Moses (Philippians 3:6) and fought to stamp out Christianity because he sincerely believed it to be heresy. He later confessed that he had been a blasphemer, a persecutor and an injurious person but had obtained mercy because he did it ignorantly in unbelief (I Timothy 1:13). But his fanatic upsurge of persecution after the death of Stephen was evidently an unconscious fight against the convicting power of the Holy Ghost. He had heard Stephen preach

the gospel of Jesus Christ and had witnessed the manifestation of the Spirit of Christ in his prayer for those who stoned him. No doubt the memory of the glory of God that shone in the face of Stephen was a haunting influence upon his conscience. And perhaps the fact that devout men made great lamentation over Stephen as they carried him to his burial added to his agitation. Saul rebelled for a time against the conviction of the Holy Ghost, but the Lord finally conquered him.

### **The Gospel Spread By Persecution**

(Verse 4)

Saul's campaign of persecution was intended to stamp out the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, but instead it was the means of spreading it to many other parts of the world. Those who left Jerusalem because of intense persecution went everywhere preaching Jesus. Persecution will not intimidate those whose faith is anchored in the Lord Jesus Christ, for they look beyond this mortal life to an eternal hope (Hebrews 6:18-20). Jesus had admonished His disciples not to fear those who only have power to kill the body, but rather to fear Him who has power to cast into hell (Matthew 10:28). The apostles boldly told the Jewish council that they must obey God rather than men (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29). And Saul himself, after he became the apostle Paul, testified that neither tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, peril, sword, or any other thing should be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35-39).

The Spirit-filled saints who left Jerusalem on account of persecution did not flee for fear of death, for they had

an eternal hope. But this seemed to be God's sign that it was time to carry His gospel to other parts of the world. Jesus had commissioned His disciples to become His witnesses, by the power of the Holy Ghost, not only to Jerusalem, but to Judaea and Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the world (Acts 1:8). But apparently they had been reluctant to leave the fellowship of the saints in Jerusalem until this heavenly atmosphere was disrupted by persecution. The apostles remained in Jerusalem to superintend the work and to look after those who were unable to leave. But many of the saints fled into the surrounding areas of Judaea and Samaria, and some went on to more distant points.

Jesus had told them that when they were persecuted in one city, they should flee to another (Matthew 10:23). And this was the sign that seemed to set the pattern for their evangelization. Paul left almost every field of labor under heavy persecution (Acts 13:44-52; 14:19-20; 20:1). But this only served to intensify his efforts in the next place, until the whole Gentile world, as well as the land of Israel, felt the impact of his ministry.

### **The Gospel Preached in Samaria**

(Verses 5-25)

Philip was the second one of the seven deacons to become an evangelist. He may not have preached in Jerusalem, but when he was forced by persecution to leave Jerusalem, he went to Samaria and preached the gospel of Jesus Christ with great success. The people of Samaria had been deceived by magic tricks into thinking that a man known as Simon the sorcerer was a great power of God. But when Philip demonstrated the real power of

## *Acts*

God, they accepted his message readily. The purpose of Philip's ministry was not merely to show that he could perform miracles but he, by the power of the Holy Ghost, ministered to the needs of the people in the healing of the sick and crippled and the casting out of evil spirits. No doubt the Samaritans remembered the ministry of Jesus at Jacob's well. And great numbers of both men and women were baptized and were filled with great joy for the many benefits and blessings of the Holy Ghost upon their lives.

Simon the sorcerer was deeply impressed by the demonstration of the power of the Holy Ghost in miracles and healings. And, since he was losing his followers to Philip, he decided to go along with the crowd. But he, like many today, believed in the miracles more than he believed in the Lord. He conceded that Philip had greater power than he, and he hoped to find the secret by which he might obtain this power. He did not know that the power of God may be obtained only through whole-hearted repentance.

God confirms His word with signs following (Mark 16:15-20), but His saints must love and worship Him for Himself and not merely for the benefits or the sensation of His miracles. Miracles are only by-products of the gospel. The cleansing and saving power of the Holy Ghost is of most importance.

Simon went so far as to be baptized by Philip, but he was captivated by the miracles rather than by any desire to know the love of Christ and His saving power. Philip was greatly used of the Lord, but he seemed not to have discerned the insincerity of Simon.

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard of Philip's min-

istry in Samaria, they immediately sent Peter and John to investigate the work that was being done there. Jesus ordained the twelve apostles for the very special mission of laying the foundation of the New Testament church (Acts 1:21-22; 10:40-42; I Corinthians 3:10-11). He had given Peter the keys of the kingdom (the privilege and responsibility of preaching the first gospel sermon on the Day of Pentecost) to open up to men the way into salvation. Later, others preached the gospel, but God made the apostles responsible to see that the true gospel was preached (Galatians 1:6-9) and that the right foundation was laid in every place. It was their duty to investigate each new work to make sure that it was begun and carried on according to apostolic doctrine.

When Peter and John came to Samaria, they found everything in order, so far as it had gone, but they were confronted with the responsibility of praying for the people to be filled with the Holy Ghost. Philip's zealous preaching and miracles of healing had converted the people to the doctrine, and they had been baptized, but as yet they had not received the Holy Ghost. Perhaps God desired to teach the Samaritan people, who had long sought to worship Him independently of the Jews (John 4:19-24), respect for the authority of the apostles in Jerusalem.

Peter and John came to Samaria in the authority that Jesus had bestowed on them (John 20:21-23), and when they laid their hands on the people in the name and in the power of Jesus Christ, they received the Holy Ghost. This authority was later transmitted to others, but in the beginning it was necessary to establish the authority of the apostles, that the church should be built on the foundation



## *Acts*

of God's truth which He gave to the apostles by revelation (Galatians 1:11-19). The requirements of the gospel message were repentance and baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, on which conditions the Lord promised the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38). Philip's work in Samaria was not complete until the people had received the Holy Ghost.

It is not enough to die with Christ by repentance, to be buried with Him by baptism, but we must receive His Spirit by which we may walk in His new life (Romans 6:3-4). "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (I Corinthians 12:13).

Simon had been genuinely impressed with the miracles of Philip's ministry, but when he saw the demonstration of the people receiving the Holy Ghost as Peter and John laid their hands on them, he determined to obtain that power, even at great cost. He had been baptized in water, but he could not be included among those who received the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the apostles' hands, because he had not repented of his wicked sorcery and love of money. He only wanted to make merchandise of the power of the Holy Ghost. And he imagined he could buy the power to bestow it on others without meeting the requirement of the gospel.

Even if Peter and John could have been bribed, they could not have given him the Holy Ghost. God alone can bestow His Spirit, and He gives the Holy Ghost only to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32). But these men of God could not be tempted with filthy lucre. Peter told him he must perish with his money because he thought the gift

of God could be purchased with money. Simon then fearfully asked him to pray that the judgments he had pronounced might not come on him, but he did not repent, and there is no record of his ever coming to the Lord.

When Peter and John had confirmed the word of the Lord and finished their mission in Samaria, they returned to Jerusalem. But they took advantage of this tour to preach the gospel in every village of the Samaritans which they passed through. Their vision was being extended, and they were being made to realize that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost of all people. They considered themselves debtors to preach the gospel of Jesus to every city and village possible (Romans 1:14-15).

### **Conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch**

(Verses 26-40)

Philip was led to Samaria by circumstances, but his going into the desert to minister to the Ethiopian eunuch was by the direct leading of the Lord. He did a great work in Samaria, even though the people did not receive the Holy Ghost till Peter and John came and laid hands on them. He was not only zealous, but he was earnest and sincere and wholly dedicated to the service of the Lord, as evidenced by the fact that he was able to hear the voice of the Lord and promptly obeyed His call.

The Lord did not tell Philip why he was to go into the desert but simply told him to follow the road leading south, which would intersect the way (road) which led from Jerusalem to Gaza. He could have reasoned that it was unwise to leave the revival meeting in Samaria to go into a desert place, but without questioning he obeyed the call of God. Gaza was possibly thirty-five or forty miles

## *Acts*

southwest from Jerusalem, and the road from Jerusalem to Gaza was the main route leading to Egypt and Ethiopia. The intersection to which Philip was directed was in an uninhabited desert area somewhere between Jerusalem and Gaza. And Philip's prompt obedience to the call of the Lord was most important to the mission he was to accomplish.

While Philip journeyed on foot southward from Samaria, the Ethiopian eunuch journeyed in his chariot from Jerusalem toward Gaza. The term eunuch may have referred only to the high office of treasurer which he held in the court of Candace, queen of Ethiopia. He was evidently a proselyte to Judaism. He had gone to Jerusalem to worship Jehovah and was now returning to Ethiopia. He sincerely desired to know and obey all the truth of God, but he seems not to have come into contact with the Christians or to have heard the gospel while he was in Jerusalem. He had failed to find the answer to his questions and the satisfaction he hungered for. But God saw his honest and hungry heart and sent Philip to show him the way of salvation in Jesus.

Personal evangelism is a very important part of the Lord's work. Perhaps the principal reason it is so important is because God deals with people as individuals. He dealt with His natural people Israel more on the basis of the group. All who were born of the tribes of Israel were subjects of the kingdom by reason of nationality. But in His spiritual kingdom every member is hand-picked and regenerated. The Lord considers His people as a unit, as a body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:12-20), but He knows and deals with each member personally. He sends evangelists to convert individuals rather than groups, and

when individuals are brought together in Christ they make up the group. Members of the kingdom of God are not mere statistics but individual personalities, each of whom is important to the Lord.

Each person of the whole world's population is important to the Lord, even before he is saved. God commended His love toward us, as individuals, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us (John 3:16; Romans 5:6-8). Jesus saw Nathanael under the fig tree (John 1:45-49), He saw Zacchaeus in the sycamore tree (Luke 19:1-10), and He heard the cry of blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52). He had time for the sickly woman who pressed through the crowd to touch the hem of His garment (Luke 8:41-48). He considered the sinful Samaritan woman of Sychar important to the kingdom of God (John 4:3-24). And He called Philip away from the revival meeting in Samaria to preach the gospel of salvation to the Ethiopian eunuch.

Philip did not know, until he arrived at the intersection of the two roads, why God called him to this desert area. But he understood when he saw the Ethiopian reading the Scriptures as he sat in his chariot. If he had not promptly obeyed God's call, the chariot would have already passed this intersection before he arrived, and he would not have met this man; but by the direction of the Lord, he arrived at just the proper time.

The Lord often gives specific directions for special missions, and it is most important that we hear and obey His voice. He instructed Cornelius to send for Simon Peter who was lodging in the house of Simon the tanner by the seaside in Joppa, giving him this explicit address. And He carefully prepared Peter to respond to this call

## *Acts*

(Acts 10:1-21). He spoke to Ananias in a vision and sent him to the house of Judas on Straight Street in the city of Damascus to pray for and baptize Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:10-18). God never makes a mistake, and if we follow His divine leading, we will never need to worry about the results or consequences.

God had perfectly set the stage for Philip to lead the Ethiopian into salvation in Jesus Christ. He arranged for Philip to arrive at this intersection not only at the precise time the Ethiopian was to arrive but also at the opportune time when he was reading Isaiah's prophecy of the suffering of Christ. The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, which the Ethiopian was reading while sitting in his chariot as his servant drove along the road, is a graphic picture of the crucifixion of Jesus. The Lord had prepared the eunuch to receive Philip's message and had supplied the very Scripture text to be used.

As Philip approached the intersection of the two roads and saw the chariot, the Spirit of the Lord told him to go near and address the occupant of the chariot. As Philip approached the chariot, he heard the eunuch reading the Scripture and asked if he understood what he was reading. This very question was uppermost in the mind of the Ethiopian at this time, and he invited Philip to get into the chariot and explain this Scripture to him. He was anxious to learn of whom the prophet had spoken these things.

The Ethiopian's desire opened the way for Philip to use this text to preach to him the gospel of Jesus Christ. He showed how Jesus had perfectly fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy and explained to him the full Pentecostal message. In preaching Jesus, he necessarily showed the

gospel requirements that one must believe in Jesus, repent of his sins, and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of his sins that he might be filled with the Holy Ghost.

The Ethiopian had an open mind and a hungry heart, and he readily received Philip's message, as evidenced by his asking to be baptized as they had just reached a place where there was a pool or a stream of water. And, again, it was by the providence of God that they came to water at the strategic time that the eunuch was ready to be baptized. He confessed his faith to Philip and ordered the chariot to halt and he and Philip got out of the chariot and went down into the water and Philip baptized him.

God put His confirmation on this obedient act of faith by pouring out the Holy Ghost on both Philip and the eunuch. Some ancient manuscripts read that the Spirit of the Lord fell on the eunuch, and the angel of the Lord snatched Philip away (*Clarke's Commentary*). The eunuch was evidently filled with the Holy Ghost, and he went on his way rejoicing. The power of God was so strong on Philip that he was caught away, so that the eunuch did not see him again.

Philip was caught away by the Spirit of God. It is generally believed that he was transported bodily through the air to the city of Azotus. After he found himself in Azotus, which was a city on the coast of the Mediterranean some distance north of Gaza, he followed the coastline northward, preaching in every city, until he came to Caesarea. He evidently settled in Caesarea and married and raised a family there. The next account given of him was of his entertaining Paul and his party in his home in Caesarea on the occasion of Paul's last trip to Jerusalem. It was

## *Acts*

recorded of him that he had four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:8-9).

Tradition reveals that the Ethiopian was the first preacher of the gospel in Ethiopia. We certainly would expect him to have carried the message of Jesus Christ and the testimony of his own glorious experience back to his own people. And no doubt it was because of the key position which he held and the ministry he would be able to perform, as well as for himself, that the Lord sent Philip to show him the way of salvation in Jesus Christ.

# Chapter 9

## **The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus**

(Verses 1-19)

Before Saul of Tarsus was converted to Jesus, he was a fanatic persecutor of the followers of Jesus. After the stoning of Stephen, he led a furious campaign of persecution against the Christians in Jerusalem. He had evidently felt the conviction of the Holy Ghost as he listened to the anointed preaching of Stephen and saw the glory of God in his countenance when he prayed for his enemies, but he had resisted. And doubtless the conflict within his own soul drove him to this relentless campaign of persecution.

In this distraught and unhappy state of mind, he was, for a time, beside himself with hatred and a spirit of vengeance against the Christians. As he fought against the conviction of the Holy Ghost, he became more determined to stamp out Christianity. And when the disciples of Jesus began to scatter from Jerusalem to escape his persecution, he obtained letters of authority from the high priest to arrest and imprison all the Christians in Damascus.



## *Acts*

Saul was to learn the futility of fighting against the purpose of God and of trying to hinder the spread of His gospel (Acts 5:34-39; II Corinthians 13:8). The fact that he determined to arrest both men and women indicated that the women also had manifested great zeal for the cause of Christ. God had poured out His Spirit on both the sons and the daughters of Israel (Acts 2:14-18).

Although Saul was fanatic in his fight against the Christians, he honestly believed he was fighting against heresy. He did not knowingly or deliberately reject the truth of God. He afterward testified that he had obtained mercy because his persecution of the saints had been in ignorance and unbelief (I Timothy 1:12-16). He was very zealous for the law of Moses and had been more successful than some in keeping the letter of the law (Philippians 3:4-6). But he was far from keeping the spirit of it, and in his inner consciousness he was always under condemnation (Romans 7:7-23). When he later wrote to the Romans that the carnal mind was an enemy to God, and could not be made subject to His law (Romans 8:7), he wrote of that which he had learned by actual experience.

Saul honestly believed Jesus to be an imposter and thought that he was fighting on God's side against heresy. But just before he entered the city of Damascus, where he intended to arrest all the Christians, he was himself arrested by the Lord. Suddenly a great light from heaven shined upon him and he fell powerless to the ground. This miraculous manifestation took place at midday (Acts 22:6), and Saul later testified that the light from heaven, which rendered him helpless, was brighter than the noon-day sun (Acts 26:13).

Light and fire are significant of the character of God,

and he has often manifested Himself in this likeness. He is light (absolute perfection), and in Him is no darkness (evil) at all (I John 1:5). John said of Jesus that in Him was life and that His life was the light of men (John 1:4). The light of life shined from Jesus in the midst of a dark world, but men were so blind to the things of God that they were unable to perceive His light (John 1:5, II Corinthians 4:6).

The voice of the Lord spoke out of this great light to Saul as he lay in the dust and said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Saul realized that the Lord had spoken to him, but he acknowledged that he did not know the Lord. When he asked, "Who art thou, Lord?" he was told that Jesus was the Lord (Jehovah). And when he became acquainted with Jesus, he later declared that God had given Him a name which was above every name and that every knee should bow and every tongue should confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11). He now surrendered completely to the Lord and asked what He would have him do.

Jesus, in revealing Himself to Saul, revealed to him the state of his own soul. He told him that he had been fighting against the conviction of his own heart and was harming himself more than the saints whom he persecuted. He was like the ox who hurt himself when he kicked back against the pricks of the sharp metal point on the end of the pole that was used to urge him forward.

When Saul realized he had been fighting against the Lord, all the fight went out of him, and he surrendered to Jesus. Of course he could do nothing less, for he had been rendered blind and helpless by the light and power of God that had struck him down. But in his physical blindness

## *Acts*

he was able to see more of spiritual truth than he had ever known before (John 9:39-41).

A revelation of the presence of God makes mortal men conscious of their own helplessness and sinful, undone condition. Job saw himself in this light when he became thoroughly acquainted with God (Job 42:5-6). Isaiah saw himself as undone and unclean in the light of his vision of the glory of God (Isaiah 6:1-5). A vision of God left Daniel feeling helpless and corrupt (Daniel 10:7-8). John fell as one dead at the feet of the glorified Christ (Revelation 1:17). And this vision left the fiery Saul of Tarsus forever subdued at the feet of Jesus.

Saul was completely conquered when he was struck down in the road by the Lord. He asked two questions which revealed the transformation that had taken place in his attitude within those few minutes. He asked, "Who art thou, Lord?" In this question he acknowledged his conqueror as Lord. And when it was revealed to him that the Lord was Jesus, he asked, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" The Lord answered that in Damascus he would be shown what he must do. And many years later, as he labored in fulfillment of the commission he had received in Damascus, he said, "For necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel" (I Corinthians 9:16).

Blind and thoroughly humbled, he was led into Damascus to the house of Judas on Straight Street, where he fasted and prayed for three days before God sent Ananias to pray for him. This must have been a time of near despair, as he realized all his past zeal and works in which he had taken great pride had been totally discounted by the Lord. He came face to face with the fact

that he had been an enemy to God and a persecutor of His people. He had not only been arrested in his campaign of persecution against the disciples of Jesus, but he had been stopped, as if on the precipice of a cliff, with no future before him in which to hope. His only ray of hope was in the message of God that he would be told what he must do. The three days in which he waited for God's next move were spent in deep repentance, as he reviewed his sins. And in this state of mind he had no desire for food or drink.

Saul had intended harm to the disciples of Jesus in Damascus, but it was now fortunate for him that there was a certain disciple in this city who was in such close touch with the Lord that he could hear His voice and who was dedicated to obey Him. The Lord revealed to Ananias the name of the man to whom he was to minister and the very street and house where he would find Saul.

We are told that there is still a street in Damascus by the name of Straight, about half a mile long and running east and west. Perhaps its name was significant of the change that was to take place in Saul. Spiritually speaking, everyone needs to move to Straight Street.

Ananias naturally had some misgivings when he learned that he was being sent to minister to Saul of Tarsus, but he was reassured with the word that Saul was now praying and was a chosen vessel to perform a special ministry for the Lord. Saul was prepared to obey his message by a vision of Ananias coming to him. The Lord never sends one down a blind alley, but success is assured when His voice is fully obeyed.

We see the working of God's assembly line in the events which led to Saul's conversion. Stephen was used

## *Acts*

to testify of the gospel of Jesus and to demonstrate the power of God before Saul, after which he passed off the scene of action. And Ananias faithfully fulfilled his part in praying for Saul and baptizing him, after which we hear no more of him. But we believe that both these men, and perhaps many others, will share in the eternal rewards for the thousands of souls that Saul won for Christ and the thousands of every age who have been benefited from his inspired epistles.

God saves men by the instrumentality of His servants. He has ordained His redeemed saints as His ambassadors to present the message of salvation to the world and to intercede in prayer for the lost to be saved. Each of us should always be ready to testify and to perform any service that we are privileged to perform. Perhaps we would see many more people saved if we were always ready to say, "I am here, Lord; send me." We may be sure that not even a cup of cold water given in the name of a disciple, as unto the Lord, shall lose its reward (Mark 9:41).

God told Ananias that He would show Saul how greatly he should suffer for His name's sake. But He did not send suffering on Saul as retribution for the suffering he had inflicted on others. The persecutions, sacrifices, hardships, and various sufferings to which he was subject were the natural consequences of his carrying the gospel of Jesus Christ to Gentiles, kings, and the people of Israel. It is unthinkable that he could have taken the gospel into Gentile countries, even to the very seat of Satan (Revelation 2:13), without encountering many hardships and persecutions.

Pioneering in any field is hazardous and requires sacrifices. The men who erected the DEW (Distant Early

Warning) line across the northern coast of North America did so under tremendous hardships and dangers. (See *National Geographic Magazine*, July 1958.) This is a wall of radar for the purpose of detecting and warning of any surprise atomic attack from over the Arctic. Surely God's saints should also be willing to endure any necessary hardships and dangers in order to warn the world of the impending eternal destruction of all who are not prepared to escape it.

Saul's call to bear the name of Jesus to Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel was incorporated into his conversion. An important part of the transformation made in his life was in his preaching the faith that he had before sought to destroy (Galatians 1:23).

We can only imagine the mental agony which Saul must have endured during his three days of blindness, while he fasted and prayed and repented. He doubtless charged himself with the murder of Stephen (Acts 8:1) and remembered the suffering he had inflicted on the saints of God, of which Jesus indicted him with inflicting on Himself (Acts 9:5). And in memory of these sins, he ever afterward felt unworthy of the grace of God but expressed an undying thankfulness for His mercy in forgiving him and calling him into His service. (See I Corinthians 15:9-10; Ephesians 3:8; I Timothy 1:12-13.)

Ananias was sent to instruct Saul, to pray for him to receive his sight and to be filled with the Holy Ghost, and to baptize him in water. When Ananias laid his hands on him, as God had shown him in a vision (verse 12), and greeted him as "Brother Saul," he must have felt a renewed hope after the darkness of the past three days. Ananias' greeting helped to prepare him to receive the

message of the Lord and to yield Himself to the Holy Ghost. Ananias then told him of the call of God upon his life and commanded him to be baptized for the remission of his sins (Acts 22:12-16). As Ananias prayed, the scales fell from Saul's eyes. He arose, was baptized and received the Holy Ghost. And we know, by his own testimony, that he spoke with tongues (I Corinthians 14:18).

### **Saul's Escape from Damascus**

(Verses 20-25)

As soon as Saul was filled with the Holy Ghost, he joined the assembly of saints in Damascus. And he began immediately to preach that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. He, being well educated in the Old Testament Scriptures, ably proved that Jesus fulfilled all the prophetic Scriptures concerning the promised Messiah. As he increased in spiritual strength and understanding, the Old Testament became a new book to him, and he was able to interpret it in the light of its fulfillment in Jesus.

At first the Jews registered only astonishment as Saul took advantage of the opportunity to preach in their synagogues that Jesus was the Christ. But as he increased in fervor and skill in his argument, they began to lay plans to stop him. We are not told how long he was permitted to minister in the synagogues in Damascus, but the "many days" of verse 23 implies that it was some time before they organized a campaign of persecution against him. However, his bold and able preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ finally stirred them to the extent that they laid a plot to kill him.

The natural law that one reaps what he sows runs through every facet of human experience, hence it was

inevitable that Saul should reap some of the seeds of persecution he had sown. However, his reaping was not the direct retribution of God but was rather a natural consequence of his allying himself with Jesus and His followers (John 15:18-21; Hebrews 10:32-34). All who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution (II Timothy 3:12).

In Damascus, God delivered Saul from a plot of the Jews. They had plotted to kill him when he attempted to leave Damascus and had stationed guards to watch the gates night and day. But the disciples helped him to escape through the window of a house on the wall and let him down in a basket to the ground on the outside of the wall. His escape was probably similar to that of Joshua's spies who escaped from the house of Rahab on the wall of Jericho.

Paul afterward said of this incident, "In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: and through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands" (II Corinthians 11:32-33). The Jews evidently prevailed on the governor to station a garrison of soldiers to guard the gates of Damascus so they might arrest Saul when he tried to leave the city.

### **Saul's Three Years in Arabia**

(Verses 26-31)

We learn from Saul's own testimony that there was a lapse of time of approximately three years between his escape from Damascus and his returning to Jerusalem. His account of this period fills in the story between verse 25 and 26. He testified that he did not go directly to Jerusalem from Damascus but went into Arabia. After



## *Acts*

having been in Arabia for perhaps nearly three years, where he received directly from the Lord the revelation of the gospel of grace apart from the works of the law, he returned to Damascus and then went to Jerusalem for the brief period of fifteen days (Galatians 1:11-24) before going on to Tarsus in Cilicia of Asia Minor.

On that occasion, the disciples in Jerusalem were afraid of him, although they had heard of his conversion three years previous. But Barnabas, true to his character as a son of consolation (Acts 4:36), believed in his sincerity. He brought him to the apostles and vouched for the reality of his conversion, after which they received him into their fellowship.

During his fifteen days in Jerusalem at this time, the Jews again laid a plot to kill him. But the disciples learned of their plot and took him to Caesarea, from which point he returned by boat to his birthplace in Tarsus of Cilicia (Acts 9:26-31; Galatians 1:18-21). After Saul disappeared from the scene of action, persecution of the Christians in Judea died down for a time. The church had a period of rest, during which the number of disciples was multiplied.

### **Peter's Ministry at Lydda**

(Verses 32-35)

Some time after Peter and John returned from Samaria, where they had laid hands on Philip's converts and they had received the Holy Ghost (Acts 8:14-17), Peter went on another evangelistic tour through Judea and Samaria. As Peter and John had returned from Samaria to Jerusalem, they had preached in many Samaritan villages (Acts 8:25). And now on this tour, which took place three or four years later, Peter no doubt

visited many of those same villages, where he now found assemblies of saints. By this time the gospel had spread through Palestine, so that there were churches scattered through Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. (See Acts 9:31.)

It is probable that there was an assembly of disciples in Lydda and that Aeneas was one of their number. The fact that he had been an invalid from paralysis for the past eight years must have been a great burden and cause of grief to himself and to the other Christians. But the Lord was compassionate of the burdens of these saints and sent Peter to pray the prayer of faith for Aeneas. As soon as he met Aeneas he sensed that he had faith to be healed and told him to arise and make his bed. Perhaps Peter remembered the occasion on which Jesus had told the paralyzed man, who had been let down through the roof, to arise and take up his bed and walk (Matthew 9:1-8). And he knew that Jesus continued to perform His works through the instrumentality of His Spirit-filled ministers.

The healing of Aeneas not only brought relief from his suffering, and encouragement and comfort to all the disciples in Lydda, but it brought a stir and revival to all the people of Lydda and the surrounding country of the plain of Saron or Sharon.

Jesus included the ministry of healing in His commission to the apostles to evangelize the world by His gospel (Mark 16:15-18). And He confirmed the apostolic ministry with signs following (Mark 16:20; I Corinthians 2:1-5). Peter demonstrated such faith in praying for the sick that many people came to believe the sick would be healed if they could be placed where his shadow would pass over them (Acts 5:12-16). However, the apostles

## *Acts*

made no such claim. We know there was no virtue in Peter's shadow. The people were not healed by his shadow but by the Holy Ghost through faith. Peter and John had faith to command the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple to stand and walk, but they declared that it was not by their own power or holiness but through faith in the name and power of Jesus Christ that he was healed (Acts 3:1-16). And Peter, as the instrument and representative of Jesus, told Aeneas to arise and make his bed, and his healing was instantaneous and miraculous.

The healings which Jesus performed, and which He wrought through the ministry of His disciples, were not of natural consequences but by the supernatural power of God. There are natural healing propensities built into the human organism, but God's divine healing, whether gradual or instantaneous, restores that which nature cannot repair. Jesus healed the woman who for twelve years had spent all her living on physicians but had only grown worse (Luke 8:43-48). And He healed many whose conditions would otherwise have been hopeless (John 5:1-9; 9:1-38). His power to heal proved that He had power to make sinful men into new creatures (Luke 5:17-26).

Jesus' ministry of healing was only a by-product of His ministry of healing for the soul. Sickness and death came on men because of sin, and Jesus' healing of all manner of sickness and diseases signified His power to save men from all sin and its penalty of death (Matthew 1:21; Hebrews 7:23-28; 10:4-10). The greatest miracle men can know is the healing of the soul from the disease of sin (Psalm 6:1-4; 41:4; Isaiah 53:4-6; Hosea 6:1; 14:4; Luke 4:16-21).

**Peter's Ministry in Joppa**  
(Verses 36-43)

The saints in Joppa knew of the ministry of Peter and had heard of the recent healing of Aeneas in Lydda. Lydda was only a short distance from Joppa—possibly about five miles. And, although the raising of the dead was not a frequent occurrence, they felt the loss of Dorcas so keenly that they hoped God might raise her from the dead if Peter prayed for her. So they prepared her body for burial but sent messengers hastily to ask Peter to come without delay.

Dorcas was a faithful saint and a worthy character, whose sickness and death did not result from any moral or spiritual failure on her part. Like the family of Stephanas (I Corinthians 16:15), she had addicted herself to the ministry of the saints. Her sickness, which led to death, may have resulted from overwork, exposure, some hereditary weakness or natural cause, or she may have contracted some contagious disease. These causes lead finally to the death of all mortals.

The mortal body wears out and is finally used up. Many hasten the process of death by a life of sin, but often the innocent die early simply because some part of their human organism breaks down. But Dorcas was another whose sickness was not unto death but for the glory of God (John 11:4). Generally speaking, the health pattern of all men is produced by natural physical laws and processes. But God made provision for the miraculous healing of the physical disabilities of His people, in accordance with His will. He is sovereign and able to overrule any natural law He has set in operation, even that of death. And He chose to do so in the

## *Acts*

case of the death of Dorcas.

When Peter arrived in Joppa, the weeping, grief-stricken widows showed him the garments Dorcas had made for the poor and needy. They not only mourned the loss of her presence but also the loving and valuable service she had rendered. And perhaps they hoped that the knowledge of her worthiness might influence Peter's prayer on her behalf.

Peter knew that the human sympathy and grief of these friends would hinder the prayer of faith. He put all the mourners out of the room so he might pray in the Holy Ghost, according to God's divine purpose. And it was God's will to raise Tabitha (Dorcas) from the dead, not merely because of the garments she had made for the poor but for a testimony of Christ, who is the resurrection and the life (John 11:23-26). As Peter prayed, God gave him faith to command Tabitha to arise, and she opened her eyes and sat up. He then took her by the hand, lifted her to her feet and presented her to the saints and friends she had served.

By earnest and effectual prayer, our own minds and attitudes of faith are changed, so that God is able to change conditions and circumstances and accomplish that which is His will. When we give ourselves to prayer, the Holy Ghost helps our infirmities and prays through us according to His own will (Romans 8:26-27).

It is appointed to all mortals to die (Hebrews 9:27), for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (I Corinthians 15:50). Our mortal bodies must die, or be changed at the coming of the Lord when we shall be given immortal bodies in which to live eternally (I Corinthians 15:51-57). The few people who have been raised from the

dead back to mortal life have had to die again. But there is a better resurrection for all who have hope in Christ, in which there will be no more death (Hebrews 11:35; Philippians 3:20-21; Revelation 21:3-4). Resurrection back to mortal life, like healing of the physical body, is only temporary, but it is a witness and a confirmation that those who die in Christ shall live eternally with Him. Death is not defeat for God's saints but is rather the door to eternal victory (Philippians 1:21).

The miracle of the raising of Dorcas was a testimony by which many were made to believe in the Lord. Peter remained in Joppa for some time, no doubt to preach the gospel and evangelize the city and surrounding country.



# Chapter 10

## **Cornelius' Angelic Visitation** (Verses 1-8)

Cornelius and his household were the first Gentiles, except those who were proselytes to Judaism, to be baptized by the Holy Ghost into the New Testament church of Jesus Christ. The members of the church of Jesus Christ are baptized by His Spirit into His body (I Corinthians 12:13).

In New Testament times, many Gentiles had become proselytes to the Jews' religion by observing Israel's covenant ceremony of circumcision. These were accepted by both Jews and Christians into the full benefits and privileges of their religion. However, Cornelius was not a proselyte (had not been circumcised), neither was he a heathen. This man, who was a Roman military officer, a captain over one hundred men, believed in and feared the true and living God of Israel. He was devout (sincerely religious), gave much alms to the needy and prayed to God alway (daily). So it is not surprising that God took special notice of him. He seems to have observed the regular Jewish prayer hours: the third hour of the day (about



## *Acts*

9:00 A.M.), the sixth hour (12:00 noon), and the ninth hour (about 3:00 P.M.).

On a certain day, while he was in prayer at the ninth hour, the Lord sent an angel to him with a very special message. He had probably been praying for a greater revelation and knowledge of God, and the sincerity of his prayers, which were backed up by works (James 2:17-20), demanded the recognition of the Lord. The angel told him to send men to Joppa and call for one named Simon Peter who lodged with Simon the tanner in a house by the seaside. This man would tell him words whereby he and all his house should be saved (Acts 11:13-14).

God sent the angel to tell Cornelius what to do, but the angel could not preach to him the message of salvation. The Lord has reserved the privilege of preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ for men who were themselves once lost but have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus (I Peter 1:18-20). Those who come to Jesus and receive His Holy Spirit become His representatives to witness to others of that which they have experienced (Acts 1:8; 5:32). The Lord uses His Spirit-filled ministers to minister to others of the gift they have received, as good stewards of His manifold grace (I Peter 4:10-11).

Cornelius lost no time in carrying out the instruction of the angel. He called two of his most trusted servants and a devout soldier of his band and apparently sent them that same afternoon on the way to Joppa to find the man whose name and street address had been given him by the angel.

### **Peter's Vision**

(Verses 9-16)

God, who instructed Cornelius to call for Peter, also

prepared Peter for his call. While the messengers of Cornelius were en route to Joppa, He gave Peter a special revelation to prepare him to receive them. Caesarea, which was also a seacoast city on the Mediterranean, was about thirty-five miles north of Joppa. The servants of Cornelius were evidently sent on their way the very afternoon of his vision, traveling as far as they could that night and resuming the journey early the next morning, for they arrived in Joppa soon after the sixth hour (noon).

It was about the sixth hour (the noon hour of prayer) that Peter went up on the housetop (the flat roof of the house which was used as an outdoor sitting room) to pray. The noon meal was being prepared downstairs in the house, and as the aroma of cooking food was wafted to him at his place of prayer he suddenly felt very hungry.

God took advantage of his hunger to teach him a very important and timely lesson before the messengers from Cornelius should arrive. He showed him in a vision a huge sheet let down from heaven by its four corners, in which there were all manner of beasts and creeping things and fowls. In the vision, God told him to kill and eat. Peter was hungry, but he was a staunch keeper of the law of Moses, which forbade the eating of certain animals that God had designated as unclean. As he looked over the animals in the sheet, he seemed not to have seen a single clean animal which he could lawfully eat. So he told the Lord that he had never eaten any common or unclean animal. The Lord had purposely brought him to make this declaration, in order to impress upon him that he should not call that which He had cleansed common or unclean. The vision was repeated three times to impress its importance upon him. He did not yet understand its meaning, but he realized that God was

trying to teach him something of great consequence.

### **Peter's Obedience to the Vision**

(Verses 17-33)

The servants of Cornelius arrived about the time of the conclusion of Peter's vision, and the Lord told him he should go with them without doubting. He obediently went down to greet them and, after entertaining them overnight, left with them the following morning. Six Jewish brethren accompanied him on this journey (Acts 11:12). He did not yet understand the full implication of his vision, but it was revealed to him after he arrived at the home of Cornelius.

When Peter and the six Jewish brethren arrived with the messengers in Caesarea, Cornelius was ready for them. He had called in his kinsmen and near friends and had a congregation waiting to hear what he should tell them. He apparently thought Peter was some divine being, since he had received an angelic introduction to him. He fell at his feet to worship him, but Peter quickly made him understand that he was only a man.

Peter then understood the meaning of his vision. And he explained to Cornelius how the Lord had shown him, by a vision, to come to his Gentile home, which was unlawful, according to the law of the Jews. Cornelius explained how God had shown him, by an angel, to send for Peter and that he and his household were waiting to hear God's message from him.

### **Peter's Gospel Sermon**

(Verses 34-43)

Peter began his message by acknowledging he had now learned that God regarded all people alike and

accepted those of every nation who would fear Him and work righteousness. He then preached to these Gentiles the same gospel that he had preached to the Jews in Jerusalem. To preach Jesus is to preach His gospel of salvation. Peter told the household of Cornelius of His earthly ministry, His death on the cross, and of His resurrection by which He had become the judge of both the living and the dead. He told them that Jesus had fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies of God's promised Redeemer and that those who believed and obeyed His gospel should receive remission of sins. The gospel of Jesus Christ, which Paul defined as His death, burial, and resurrection (I Corinthians 15:1-4), is God's only provision for the salvation of the fallen race (Mark 16:15-20; Romans 1:16-17; 2:16; 3:20-26; 5:12-21; 6:1-10; 8:1-4; Galatians 1:6-9; Colossians 1:13-23). This is His everlasting gospel (Revelation 14:6).

### **The Result of Peter's Sermon**

(Verses 44-48)

Cornelius, having himself been prepared by the angelic visitation, had prepared his relatives and friends to receive Peter's message. Now they all, with open minds and hearts, believed every word of his sermon. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:13-17). This congregation of Gentiles believed Peter's gospel sermon and were ready to receive God's gift of life as soon as they heard of it. The Lord always answers such faith. He, knowing their hearts (Acts 5:32), poured out the Holy Ghost on them even before Peter concluded his message.

There seems to have been still another reason why God filled these Gentiles with the Holy Ghost before they

## *Acts*

were baptized. Obedience to the gospel message involves the identifying of oneself with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection life. (See Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3, 4.) Cornelius and his household had definitely repented and had been filled with the Holy Ghost, but they had not yet been baptized as the symbol of their burial with Christ. And no doubt Peter would have hesitated to baptize these Gentiles if God had not first put His approval upon them by filling them with His Spirit. Later, in defense of his action, he told the apostles in Jerusalem, "Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?" (Acts 11:17).

Peter and the six Jewish brethren who had come to Caesarea with him were convinced that God had filled Cornelius and his household with the Holy Ghost, because they heard them speak with other tongues, just as had the Jews when God poured out the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost. Then Peter challenged any man to forbid water baptism to these Gentiles who had repented and been filled with the Holy Ghost. He then commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord (Jesus Christ). God's prescribed plan requires men to repent and be baptized in order to receive the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38). But He who is sovereign has every right to digress from His regular plan any time He sees fit to do so. However, such exceptions do not change or make void His plan.

# Chapter 11

## **Peter Vindicated His Ministry to Gentiles**

(Verses 1-18)

The apostles had received the mighty revelation of the gospel of Jesus and were convinced that salvation was only in His name, through His death and resurrection. Their inspired preaching had resulted in thousands of Jews being converted to Jesus and filled with the Holy Ghost.

But these Jews did not yet understand fully that salvation in Jesus Christ was for Gentiles as well as for Jews. They had been steeped for centuries in the belief that Gentiles could have no part with the Lord except by accepting their ceremony of circumcision. Their minds were so filled with this belief, that God could only gradually reveal to them that He had opened the door of His kingdom to men of all nations. Because Israel had been God's natural people, and the only nation to be indoctrinated in the faith of one true and living God, He had given them the first opportunity to accept salvation in Jesus. (See Acts 13:42-47; 18:4-6; 19:8-10.) But He had ordained

## *Acts*

from the beginning to save men of all nations and races through the sacrifice of Christ (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:15-18; Galatians 3:8, 16; Mark 13:10; 16:15). So when the time was ripe for the spreading of the gospel among the Gentile nations, He began to reveal this truth to the apostles and saints of the early church.

The Lord revealed His acceptance of Gentiles to Peter on the housetop in Joppa, to prepare him to answer the call of Cornelius. But the apostles and brethren in Jerusalem had not yet received this revelation and consequently were greatly concerned when they learned he had gone into the home of Gentiles and had preached to them and baptized them.

It often seems more difficult to un-learn the errors of long-standing traditions than to learn the truths of God, and the presence of error blinds one to truth. The law of Moses forbade the people of Israel to enter into any social or business relations, or to intermarry, with heathen. This was to prevent their being corrupted by idolatry. But if they had correctly interpreted God's Word, they would have known that His plan of redemption in Christ included men of all nations and races. (See Isaiah 49:6; 60:3; Daniel 7:14; Hosea 2:23.) God, by the Holy Ghost, had now begun to reveal to His Spirit-filled ministers what they had failed to understand of the Old Testament Scriptures. (See Ephesians 3:1-6.)

When Peter returned to Jerusalem from Caesarea, he was immediately called in question for going into the home of Gentiles and eating with them. He stood before a council of the apostles and other ministering brethren and rehearsed the whole story to them. He told of his vision on the housetop in Joppa, of the arrival of the mes-

sengers from Cornelius, and of his returning with them in obedience to the Spirit of the Lord. He told of Cornelius' angelic visitation, of his preaching the gospel to his household, and that God had baptized them with the Holy Ghost in the same manner that He had baptized the Jews. When the brethren had heard his full story, they withdrew their objections and glorified God for what He had done, acknowledging that He had granted repentance unto life to Gentiles.

### **The Church in Antioch of Syria**

(Verses 19-30)

Many of the disciples of Jesus were scattered from Jerusalem because of the persecution which followed the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60; 8:1-4). But those who fled from Jerusalem went everywhere, preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Philip went to Samaria and had a revival among the Samaritans. Now we learn of some who preached in more distant places. Some went to Phoenicia, the principal cities of which were Tyre and Sidon, and some went on to the island of Cyprus and to Antioch in northern Syria.

At first they preached only to the Jews who resided in these various places, but those who went to Antioch later preached to Gentile Greeks. The Jews who lived in Greek countries and spoke the Greek language were called Grecians (Hellenists), but the Grecians referred to in verse 20 were evidently Gentile Greeks. The Lord blessed the ministry of these missionaries to the Greeks, and a great number of them were converted to Jesus. The church in Antioch was considered to be a Gentile church, although there were Jews in its congregation also.



## *Acts*

The apostles and brethren in Jerusalem were again concerned when they learned of the revival among the Greeks in Antioch. They had accepted Peter's explanation of his revelation from God to preach to the Gentile household of Cornelius but they still felt some concern over the preaching of Jesus to those outside the ranks of Israel. And the apostles, knowing that they were responsible to God for the laying of the foundation of the New Testament church, considered it their duty to investigate these works and determine if they were being properly conducted. When Philip had gone to Samaria, they sent Peter and John to investigate and help along his work (Acts 8:14-17).

The church leaders in Jerusalem now sent Barnabas to investigate the work in Antioch. Barnabas was very pleased with the work of the Lord which he found being carried on in Antioch. And he chose to remain to help promote and encourage the work there. His faith-inspired and Holy Ghost-anointed ministry proved to be a great blessing, and many more people were converted to the Lord.

The people of Antioch were so responsive to the gospel, and the church grew so rapidly, that Barnabas soon felt the need for more workers. Antioch was the metropolis of Syria and is said to have been the third city of importance in the Roman empire. Barnabas remembered that Saul had returned from Jerusalem to his home in Tarsus of Cilicia, in southern Asia Minor (Acts 9:26-30). And he no doubt thought of Saul's special ability in the Scriptures (Acts 9:20-22, 29) and of his special calling from the Lord (Acts 9:15). So Barnabas went to Tarsus, which was less than one hundred miles from

Antioch, and persuaded Saul to return with him to Antioch.

This was the beginning of the great missionary work of Saul of Tarsus, who became Paul the apostle. And Antioch became the headquarters of his missionary endeavors. It was here also that the disciples of Jesus first came to be called Christians, which fact was indicative of the place of Christ in the work of these missionaries.

After Saul and Barnabas had labored together in Antioch for a year, a situation arose which made it necessary for them to journey to Jerusalem. Among those who had come to Antioch from Jerusalem was Agabus, who prophesied of a dearth that would soon spread over the land. The ministry of New Testament prophets was not necessarily the foretelling of future events (I Corinthians 14:3) but occasionally they were anointed to do this. The dearth of which Agabus prophesied was expected to have dire effects on the saints of Judea. They chose to send their offering to the elders of the church in Jerusalem (the apostles) by Barnabas and Saul. It seems probable that the saints of Judea, due to having sold their possessions earlier to put the proceeds into a common fund for the benefit of all, were already in financial difficulties.



# Chapter 12

## **The Apostles Persecuted by Herod** (Verses 1-4)

King Herod, of this chapter, was Herod Agrippa I. He was the son of Aristobulus and grandson of Herod the Great. He was made king over all Palestine by the Roman emperor, but he reigned only about three years in this capacity, from 41 A.D. to 44 A.D.

Herod was ambitious to make a name for himself and undertook to obtain favor with the Jews by persecuting the Christians. He ordered James, the brother of John (sons of Zebedee), to be slain with the sword. And when he saw that this act pleased the Jews, he imprisoned Peter, intending to kill him also. But he cunningly postponed his execution till after the Passover season (the days of unleavened bread), translated “Easter” in this text. He did this also to impress the Jews, since they had religious scruples against putting one to death during a religious festival. The Herods passed as Jews and were supposed to observe the law of Moses, but they actually were Edomites (descendants of Esau), and most of them

were wicked and cruel. Herod's postponement of the execution of Peter was a mere pretense of religion for the sake of his influence with the Jews.

Peter was put in prison with four quaternions of soldiers assigned to guard him. A quaternion consisted of four soldiers, and the sixteen soldiers probably guarded by shifts, four on each of four shifts. Herod evidently intended to try to stamp out Christianity by killing all those who preached the doctrine of Jesus Christ. If he had been able to kill Peter, he no doubt would have laid hands on others of the apostles and preachers.

### **Peter's Deliverance**

(Verses 5-19)

"Peter was therefore kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." This statement reveals the secret of victorious Christianity. There was a higher power, accessible by prayer, than that which had bound Peter in prison, however secure Herod had made his guard. He was chained to two soldiers, one on either side, and other soldiers, perhaps two, stood outside to guard the door of his prison cell.

Peter did not appear to be concerned, as he slept soundly between the two soldiers. He does not seem to have been given assurance of deliverance but evidently had committed himself to the Lord for whatever was His will. He, like the three Hebrews in Babylon (Daniel 3:14-18), left the matter of either deliverance or execution wholly in the hand of the Lord. And God, who had delivered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, saw fit to deliver Peter from the hands of his enemies.

In the night, only a few hours before Peter was to

have been brought out for execution, God sent His angel to lead him out to safety. As Peter lay sleeping between the two guards, God shined His supernal light into the prison, and the angel struck him on the side to awaken him. As the angel lifted him, telling him to rise up quickly, the chains fell off his hands. He girded himself, bound on his sandals, and put on his outer garment (coat), in obedience to the angel's instruction. He then followed the angel but thought he was having a vision or dream and expected to awaken to find himself still in the prison cell.

The Lord rendered all the guards, from those guarding Peter's cell to those guarding the various wards and the iron gate of the outside wall, unconscious while the angel led Peter past them all. After passing through the iron gate, the angel led him down a certain street to a safe distance from the prison and then disappeared, leaving him on his own. And not until Peter found himself alone on a street some distance from the prison, did he realize that he had been miraculously delivered by the angel of the Lord from the wicked design of Herod and that the evil anticipation of the Jews had been disappointed.

When the angel disappeared, Peter was left to make his own decision concerning his next move. The Holy Ghost of course would influence his decision, but it was up to him to determine, by his own mental faculty, his next step. Standing alone in the darkness, he realized that as soon as it was day the guards would miss him and begin a search. He also felt confident that the saints would be praying for him at the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark and sister to Barnabas (Colossians 4:10), at whose home they met regularly for prayer. He reasoned

## *Acts*

that he could not leave Jerusalem until he let his friends know how God had delivered him in answer to their prayers. So he went first to the home of Mary.

It was necessary for Peter to knock at the gate of the fence which enclosed the courtyard to attract the attention of those within the house. However, the saints within were not sleeping but praying earnestly for his deliverance, and they sent a young girl named Rhoda to answer the knock. Although they were praying for his deliverance, they were not expecting him to knock at the gate this time of the night. They surely prayed earnestly and in faith, but knowing how securely he was guarded, they seemingly did not expect him to be delivered from the prison.

When Rhoda heard Peter's voice, she was too excited to open the gate but ran joyfully into the house to tell the saints that Peter was at the gate. They did not believe her, but when she stoutly affirmed that it was indeed Peter, they began to fear that he might have already been executed and that his angel (ghost) had appeared. But Peter continued to knock, and when they finally opened the gate they were astonished to see him standing there in person.

It was necessary for Peter to motion them to silence in the bedlam which naturally broke out at his appearance. He then told the story of his deliverance by the angel. Then, after instructing them to take the news of his deliverance to James (the other apostle James, the son of Alphaeus—Matthew 10:3; Acts 1:13) and the other brethren, he quietly left Jerusalem for an undisclosed destination. He was no doubt guided by the Lord in his wise decision to leave Jerusalem, since the soldiers of Herod

would soon begin their search for him.

When it was daylight, Peter's absence was discovered, to the dismay and confusion of the soldiers who had been assigned to guard him. When he could not be found, Herod commanded the execution of all the guards, holding them responsible for permitting the prisoner to escape. Herod then left Jerusalem and went to make his abode in Caesarea. He probably was convinced, in his heart, that Peter had been miraculously delivered out of his hands, and he feared the power of God.

### **Herod's Death**

(Verses 20-23)

Herod, for some unknown reason, had become displeased with the governments of Tyre and Sidon and had broken off trade relations with them. Tyre and Sidon, the two principal cities of Phoenicia, were important seaports and centers of world commerce. And the government officials seem to have felt keenly the loss of trade with Herod's government. When they learned that he had come to Caesarea, which was another seaport on the Mediterranean about fifty or sixty miles to the south, they sent a delegation to Caesarea who, by the mediatorship of Blastus, the king's personal attendant, applied to make peace with him.

Herod, seemingly for the purpose of declaring his conditions of peace, sat pompously on his throne, arrayed in kingly apparel, and made an oration. And the officials from Tyre and Sidon, probably more for the purpose of winning back friendly trade relations than to honor him, shouted that his voice was that of a god and not of a man. But whether their homage was sincere or insincere, its



effect was to inflate further the human ego of this king who considered himself to be a god.

At this peak of Herod's wicked pride and glory, God's judgment fell upon him. He is thought to have been stricken with a very serious and offensive disease of the bowels, by which he was said to have been eaten of worms. Josephus recorded that he died within five days.

### **The Triumph of God's Word**

(Verse 24)

Luke, at the conclusion of his account of Herod's death, added, "But the word of God grew and multiplied." In these few words he expressed the triumph of Christianity. Herod, because of his diabolic efforts against the apostles of God's Word, had come to a most ignominious end, while the continued preaching of the Word of God led to new and greater victories.

This was the record throughout the period of the early church, as well as throughout the history of God's dealing with men. Gamaliel had warned the Sanhedrin to leave the apostles alone, lest they be found to fight against God (Acts 5:34-39). And in every instance of men's trying to hinder and stop the preaching of the gospel, they were defeated and the Word and cause of God triumphed.

We, of finite minds, cannot understand why God permitted James to be killed but delivered Peter or why He permitted Stephen to be stoned to death in the very prime of his ministry. But we do know that our great infinite and omniscient God does all things well and that death is not defeat for His saints (Philippians 1:21). We are all expendable for His cause, whether in death or in service.

**The Story of Barnabas and Saul Resumed**  
(Verse 25)

The last account of Barnabas and Saul was of their being sent from Antioch to Jerusalem with an offering for the relief of the needy saints of Judea. Luke resumed their story by stating that they had fulfilled this ministry and returned to Antioch, taking with them John Mark, the son of Barnabas' sister Mary (Colossians 4:10), in whose house the saints had met to pray for Peter. And, as we continue the study of their story in chapter 13, we shall follow them into their first missionary journey.



# Chapter 13

## **PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY**

### **Barnabas and Saul Ordained for Special Service**

(Verses 1-3)

There were a number of preachers and teachers, five of whom were named, working in the church in Antioch at this time. The gospel had been preached in Antioch for possibly two or three years, and it was God's time for some of these ministers to take His gospel to other needy fields. It is not His will for too many workers to congregate in one place, while there are many people elsewhere who need to hear His Word.

This group of ministers, by dedication and intercessory prayer and fasting, had drawn near to the Lord so that they could hear His voice. His Spirit revealed to them, perhaps by prophecy or by tongues and interpretation, that Barnabas and Saul should be sent on a special missionary tour into other Gentile countries.

The other ministers, in obedience to the Spirit of God, laid hands on Saul and Barnabas and, by a prayer of ded-

ication, ordained them to the work to which the Lord had called them. This was the same kind of ordination service that we have in the church today, when God's ministers lay hands on those whom He has called, to dedicate them. It is a most blessed and beautiful service when men and women dedicate their lives to fulfill the will of God and commit their way to His direction.

### **Barnabas' and Saul's Ministry in Cyprus**

(Verses 4-12)

Antioch was about sixteen miles inland from the seaport of Seleucia on the Mediterranean coast. And the island of Cyprus, which was the early home of Barnabas (Acts 4:36), and on which Barnabas and Saul were to begin this mission, was about sixty miles southwest of Seleucia. (One should carefully study the maps of Paul's missionary journeys.) This was to be the beginning of Paul's great missionary work in the Gentile world.

Only Barnabas and Saul had been ordained for this journey, but Barnabas, feeling responsible for his nephew, took John Mark along also. The three of them journeyed to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. Their first ministry was in the synagogues of the Jews in the city of Salamis on the east coast of Cyprus. Nothing in particular was recorded of this ministry.

They soon journeyed across the island to the city of Paphos on the west coast, where the deputy, or governor, of the country was converted. This governor, Sergius Paulus, was said to be a prudent man. He also seems to have been religiously inclined, since he had been influenced by a false prophet who was a Jew named Bar-jesus. The false prophet opposed the missionaries and tried to

prevent the conversion of the governor, but Saul, by the direction of the Holy Ghost, pronounced the judgment of blindness on him for a period of time. When the governor saw that he had been struck blind and had to be led by the hand, he believed the doctrine of the Lord which Saul and Barnabas preached to him.

It was on this occasion that Saul of Tarsus first began to be called Paul. From this time on throughout his long ministry he was called Paul. This change in name did not signify a change in character (that had taken place in Damascus) but rather the full-fledged launching of the ministry to which God had called him (Acts 9:15). His ministry until now, although in some measure directed to Gentiles, had been principally in the company of Jews. Saul was his Hebrew name, but Paul was his Greek name, as fitting his status as a Roman citizen. Now that his ministry was to be almost wholly in Gentile countries, he came to be known by his Gentile name.

### **John Mark's Departure**

(Verse 13)

After the conversion of Sergius Paulus, the missionaries sailed from Paphos, in a northwesterly direction about one hundred and seventy miles, to the southern coast of Asia Minor. They ascended up the Oestrus River about seven miles to Perga in the province of Pamphylia.

From this place, John Mark returned to Jerusalem. No comment was made at this time as to why he left the missionary party, but Paul's later mention of this incident strongly implied that he had become discouraged with the hardships and dangers of missionary life and was homesick to return to his mother in Jerusalem. (See Acts

15:36-41.) But although he failed on this first trial of missionary life, being evidently quite young, he later made good and became a faithful minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ. (See II Timothy 4:11.)

**Paul's and Barnabas' Ministry in  
the Other Antioch**

(Verse 14-53)

After the departure of John Mark, Paul and Barnabas journeyed north from Perga, about one hundred miles, to Antioch in the province of Pisidia. This other Antioch is to be distinguished from the Antioch in Syria, from which they had begun their journey.

In Antioch of Pisidia they went into the Jewish synagogue on the Sabbath day. It was customary for leaders of the synagogue services, after the regular Scripture reading of the law and prophets, to call on visiting brethren to speak. Paul often took advantage of this custom to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. When on this occasion he was asked to speak, he stood up and addressed the men of Israel and those who feared God (probably proselytes) and asked them to give him audience, thereby arousing their expectancy for something special.

He then preached to them the gospel of Jesus Christ. He began his message with a brief summary of Israel's history from the time of their deliverance from Egypt to the reign of David. All Israel knew that the promised Messiah should come of the lineage of David. And Paul now told his audience that the Messiah had come. Jesus the Savior was that promised Son of David. He showed that John the Baptist had come as His forerunner. And he told how the Jews in Jerusalem, not knowing Him, had

fulfilled God's plan, which was revealed in Old Testament prophecy, by crucifying Him. He told them that He was taken down from the cross and buried (by Joseph and Nicodemus) but God raised Him from the dead, and that He was seen of His disciples many days (forty days) before His ascension. He quoted the Old Testament prophecies of Psalm 2:7; 16:8-11; Isaiah 55:3 as being fulfilled in His death and resurrection. He then witnessed that through faith in the gospel of Jesus, which he had preached to them, they could have forgiveness of sins. He also warned of the consequences of rejecting the gospel.

Many of the Jews and proselytes were converted to Jesus Christ. The Gentiles also were stirred and begged to have this gospel preached to them. The next Sabbath day almost the whole city came to the synagogue to hear the Word of the Lord.

When the Jews saw the multitude of Gentiles, they became envious and began to fight against Paul's message. They were not willing to become involved with anything that they would need to share with the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas then boldly told them that they had been honored with the first opportunity to accept the Lord Jesus Christ, but since they had proven themselves unworthy by rejecting Him, His gospel message of salvation and hope would be given to the Gentiles. He quoted the prophecy of Isaiah 42:6-7, showing that God included Gentiles in His eternal plan of salvation for men.

The Gentiles of Antioch were happy for this turn of events and gladly heard the Word of the Lord. And all who were ordained to eternal life (by the foreknowledge of God) were converted.



## *Acts*

We have no way of knowing how long the missionaries were able to preach in Antioch before being driven out by persecution. But they must have remained at least for a few weeks: long enough to publish the Word of the Lord throughout all that region. The Jews finally influenced the devout and honorable women and the chief men of the city, who evidently were Gentiles, and raised such persecution against them as to force them to leave the city. Paul and Barnabas, remembering Jesus' instruction to the twelve (Matthew 10:14), shook off the dust of their feet as a witness against them and went to Iconium. But they left in Antioch a congregation of disciples who were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost.

# Chapter 14

## **THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY** *(Continued)*

### **Paul and Barnabas in Iconium**

(Verses 1-6)

When Jesus had sent His twelve disciples on a preaching tour through Galilee, He had instructed them that when they were persecuted in one city, they should flee to another. (See Matthew 10:23.)

Paul followed this rule of the Lord during all his missionary travels. When he and Barnabas were forced to leave Antioch in Pisidia, they went on to Iconium and preached there in the synagogue of the Jews. Iconium, in the province of Lycaonia, was about sixty miles east of Antioch. They had a very successful revival in Iconium, where a multitude of people of both Jews and Greeks were converted.

Here, as elsewhere, the Jews who rejected the gospel of Jesus Christ began to persecute them. And evidently some of the Jews who had persecuted them in Antioch followed them to Iconium to stir up the people there against them (verse 19). The Jews had no authority in

## *Acts*

Gentile countries to prevent the missionaries from preaching, but they waged an insidious campaign to poison the minds of the Gentiles against them. It appears that their efforts against Paul and Barnabas in Iconium were slow to take effect, and for a “long time” they were able to speak boldly, during which indeterminate period they also performed many miracles. (Paul’s ministry was always conducted in the power and demonstration of the Holy Ghost—I Corinthians 2:1-5.)

The Jews finally succeeded in inflaming the Gentiles against them, and a mob of both Jews and Gentiles planned to assault them by stoning. Paul and Barnabas learned of this and fled to Lystra before they were able to carry out their intention. Lystra, southwest of Iconium, was the next town on the road to Derbe.

### **Paul and Barnabas in Lystra**

(Verses 7-20)

Lystra, which was also in the province of Lycaonia, was about eighteen miles south and a little west of Iconium. There seems to have been no Jewish synagogue in this city, since Paul and Barnabas preached in a public place, probably the marketplace.

In the place where they preached there sat a crippled man who had never walked. This was a parallel case to that lame man who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple in Jerusalem and who was healed through the prayers of Peter and John. (See Acts 3:1-11.) Paul noted this man’s rapt attention to the preaching of the gospel and discerned that he had faith to be healed. He called to him in a loud voice to stand up on his feet, and he obediently made the effort to stand. When he found that he could

stand, he walked and leaped.

The great crowd of heathen people gathered in this public place were amazed and excited when they saw this man, whom they knew had never been able to walk, now walking and leaping. They thought Paul and Barnabas were gods. They decided that Barnabas was Jupiter, their supreme god; and Paul, who was the chief speaker, was Mercurius, the god of eloquence. They were about to worship them, and the priest of Jupiter was making preparations to offer sacrifices to them, when Paul and Barnabas realized what they were doing and ran in among them. They were barely able to restrain them from their idolatrous intention.

We see something of the team relationship of Paul and Barnabas in the heathen's characterization of them. In the beginning of their association in the ministry, Barnabas had been the leader of the team, but before long Paul became the more prominent preacher of the two. Paul (Saul of Tarsus) had been very highly educated in the Scriptures and had very capably proved by the Scriptures that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah. (See Acts 5:34; 9:22; 22:2-3; Philippians 3:4-6.) Barnabas, thought to have been a larger man than Paul, and perhaps older, seems to have taken the lead in matters other than the preaching. But these two men worked together in perfect harmony for several years and accomplished a great work for the Lord.

### **Paul Stoned at Lystra**

(Verses 19-20)

Paul and Barnabas had escaped the mob who planned to stone them in Iconium, but a group of Jews, some of whom had come from Antioch and some from Iconium,

followed them to Lystra and persuaded the people against them. These heathen, who had been ready to worship Paul and Barnabas, were now easily influenced against them. A mob formed and stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, leaving him for dead.

But the missionaries had already won many disciples in Lystra, among whom, no doubt, was young Timothy, who later became Paul's helper in the gospel. (See Acts 16:1-3; I Timothy 1:2; II Timothy 1:2-6.) These disciples, with Barnabas, gathered around Paul, who possibly was dead, and, in answer to their earnest and desperate prayer, God raised him up. He was perfectly healed of whatever injury they had inflicted on him, so that he was able to walk back into the city. He and Barnabas remained in Lystra overnight, perhaps for the sake of the new converts there, and left for Derbe the next day.

### **Paul and Barnabas in Derbe**

(Verse 21)

Luke recorded of Derbe only that Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel to that city and taught many. But it seems evident that they won disciples in Derbe also and left a congregation of believers there, since it was said that they ordained elders in every city.

Derbe is thought to have been about twenty miles east of Lystra. Paul and Barnabas had traveled from Antioch in Pisidia in a general southeasterly direction, and if they had continued in this general direction, they soon would have reached Paul's home city of Tarsus in Cilicia. From there they could have gone overland back to Antioch in Syria. But Derbe was the turning point in this first missionary journey.

**The Return Trip**  
(Verses 21-28)

From Derbe, Paul and Barnabas began to retrace their steps, stopping in each place where they had left disciples. They felt the necessity to return to these new converts to encourage and strengthen and confirm their faith and to provide for their future spiritual guidance. They ordained the most capable from among each group as elders, or pastors, to lead them. They fasted and prayed earnestly over those whom they ordained and then commended them and their ministry to the Lord.

From Derbe, they went back to Lystra, then to Iconium, then to Antioch in Pisidia, and then back to Perga, where they now preached the Word of the Lord. From Perga, they went to Attalia, which was a seaport of Pamphylia, a few miles south of Perga. They did not return by way of Cyprus, but from Attalia they sailed between the island of Cyprus and the southern coast of Asia Minor directly to Seleucia, and from there they returned to Antioch in Syria.

They had fulfilled (completed) the work to which the elders in Antioch had ordained them. Upon their return, they called the whole church together to give a full report of all that they had been enabled to accomplish. And they remained to minister in Antioch for a "long time."

This first missionary journey covered a period of about two years.



# Chapter 15

## THE COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM

### Purpose of the Council

(Verses 1-6)

Jewish Christians, and even the apostles, did not at first understand that the ceremonial law of Moses had been fulfilled and was no longer in effect after the Day of Pentecost, when the new covenant became effective (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:6-13). Even though they had received the Holy Ghost, they continued to observe circumcision and the law of separation from the Gentiles. God had instituted circumcision for Israel as a sign of their covenant with Him (Genesis 17:9-14; Joshua 5:2-9). But He had intended it as a type only of the symbol of the new covenant with His spiritual kingdom, which was water baptism (Romans 2:25-29; Colossians 2:11-14).

Paul seems to have been the first one of the apostles to receive the full revelation that salvation is by grace, without any mixture of law (Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:5-6),



## *Acts*

through obedience to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. He received the revelation of the full gospel message directly from God soon after he escaped from Damascus and went into Arabia (Acts 9:22-25; Galatians 1:11-20). And he preached the pure gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, without any reference to the ceremonial works of the law of Moses. Later, after the Judaizers invaded his fields of labor, he told the Gentiles that to be circumcised for salvation was to make the cross of Christ without effect (I Corinthians 7:18-20; Galatians 5:1-14; 6:12-15).

Paul began his ministry to Gentiles in Antioch, in association with Barnabas. Sometime after he and Barnabas had returned from their first missionary journey through Gentile territory, some unauthorized Christian Jews came to Antioch and preached that all Gentile converts must necessarily be circumcised in order to be saved. These Jews, who were of the sect of the Pharisees, were still zealous for the ceremonial law of Moses, even though they had become disciples of Jesus. And perhaps some of the old Pharisaic pride still motivated them.

Paul and Barnabas withstood them and disputed with them, but they stubbornly insisted that Gentile Christians must be circumcised. They caused dissension and unrest in the church in Antioch by sowing seeds of discord and false doctrine. So Paul and Barnabas decided to go to Jerusalem and have the matter settled by the apostles and elders of the church there. Several other brethren of the church in Antioch accompanied them, and they were "brought on their way" (probably aided financially for the journey) by the church in Antioch.

Antioch was about three hundred miles north of

Jerusalem. By the mode of travel of that day, it was a considerable journey from Antioch to Jerusalem. But Paul and his company visited the saints and held meetings in various places as they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria on their way to Jerusalem. And the saints were made to rejoice by their report of the conversion of many Gentiles to the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were warmly received by the apostles, who also rejoiced over the report of their ministry among the Gentiles. They then called an assembly of the apostles and elders to discuss the question of whether circumcision should be required of Gentile converts.

### **The Arguments Presented**

(Verses 7-18)

The Judaizers (Christian Jews who held to the observance of the ceremonial law of Moses) seem to have spoken first. No particular points of their arguments were recorded but only that there was much disputing.

Peter was the first to answer their contention that circumcision should be required of Gentile converts. He based his argument on the revelation he had received of the Lord on the housetop in Joppa, by which the Lord prepared him to preach the gospel to the household of Cornelius in Caesarea. He contended that God's pouring out the Holy Ghost on the Gentile household of Cornelius proved that He made no difference in the means of salvation for Jews and Gentiles. He boldly stated that the Jews were not saved by the ceremonial works of the law but only through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Both Jews and Gentiles must have their hearts purified by faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. And he concluded his testimony

## *Acts*

with an admonition not to impose on Gentile converts the yoke of the ceremonial law, which even the people of Israel had never fully kept.

The righteousness of the law contained in the Ten Commandments was simple. But the Jews had made the many ceremonial cleansings and prohibitions and impositions of the Law burdensome by the traditions of the elders, which were their own oral interpretations. Jesus said of the scribes and Pharisees that they bound heavy burdens on the people, which they themselves would not lift with a finger. (See Matthew 23:4.) When they criticized His disciples for transgressing the traditions of the elders, He told them they transgressed God's law by their traditions. (See Matthew 15:1-6.)

God never intended the ceremonial law to be permanent but instituted it to regulate His natural people Israel and designed it as types and shadows of His dealing with the people of His spiritual kingdom. (See Hebrews 10:1-4.) Perhaps its greatest merit was in its types and shadows. (See Colossians 2:11-17.) God's eternal plan of salvation for men through Christ did not change but rather progressed through the Old Testament covenant to the bringing in of the new covenant in Jesus. (See Hebrews 8:7-13.)

The Old Testament covenant was a shadow or typical picture of the good things to come, with the coming of the promised Christ. And now that Jesus had ushered in the new spiritual covenant, men could be saved only by faith in and obedience to His gospel. Now the Jews were no longer saved by circumcision, much less were the Gentiles.

Paul and Barnabas testified next. They held the people

spellbound, in silence, as they related the many wonderful conversions among the Gentiles and the miracles and wonders by which God had confirmed His Word. They probably told of the conversion of the governor of Cyprus after God had struck the false prophet Bar-jesus with blindness (Acts 13:6-12), of the revival in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:14-49), of the healing of the crippled man in Lystra (Acts 14:8-18), and of the many results of their ministry among the Gentiles. Their testimonies of the demonstration of the Holy Ghost among the Gentiles convinced the apostles and elders that this work was of God.

After Paul and Barnabas concluded their testimony, James, the son of Alphaeus, who was recognized as the general overseer of the church and who presided over this council, spoke. (See Matthew 10:3.) He witnessed that Simon (Simeon) Peter's testimony of how God had sent him to Cornelius' household (the first Gentiles to be received into the church of the Lord) was in perfect agreement with Old Testament prophecy. He specifically referred to the prophecy of Amos, in which the Lord mentioned that the heathen should be called by His name. (See Amos 9:11-12.) And after he had testified, he, as head of the church and overseer of the council, gave his decision on the question of circumcision.

### **The Decision of James**

(Verses 19-35)

James' decision was that Gentiles should not be required to observe circumcision but only to abstain from their former idolatrous practices, which were often licentious. He also required that they should be restrained from eating meat from animals which had been strangled, with the

## *Acts*

blood left in. This was according to God's command for all the descendants of Noah. (See Genesis 9:3-4.)

All the apostles and elders and laymen of the church were pleased and readily agreed to his decision. They put this decree in writing and sent it to the church in Antioch by Paul and Barnabas, accompanied by Judas and Silas as witnesses to confirm the decision of the apostles. They also wrote into the decree that those men who had troubled the Gentile Christians had received no commandment and no support from the apostles. They gave a warm and enthusiastic commendation of Paul and Barnabas as men who had hazarded their lives for the name and the faith of the Lord Jesus.

The decree, when read in the church in Antioch, brought consolation and rejoicing. And Paul later delivered it to all the Gentile churches. (See Acts 16:4-5.) Judas and Silas, who were also ministers (prophets), blessed the church in Antioch with their ministry for a time. Then Judas returned to Jerusalem, but Silas chose to remain in Antioch and, with the many other ministers, assisted Paul and Barnabas in the ministry of teaching and preaching the Word of the Lord.

### **The Wisdom of Counsel**

James' wholesome spiritual teaching recorded in his epistle shows him to have been well qualified to lead the church and head the council of the apostles. He believed in humbly seeking the wisdom and leading of God in all the affairs of the church. (See James 3:13-18.) He learned patience, to rejoice in trials, and to trust God for wisdom in every circumstance. (See James 1:1-12.) He did not respect the rich above the poor but treated all impartially.

(See James 2:1-9). He taught that we should prove our faith by works. (See James 2:14-26.) And he showed the value of controlling the tongue. (See James 3:1-12.) This teaching reveals the wisdom which he demonstrated in the council on the question of circumcision.

The wisdom of God cannot come from the minds of the sinful. Men of unclean minds are capable of an earthly and devilish cunning, but only those whose minds have been renewed by the Holy Ghost are capable of the pure, peaceable, gentle, and impartial wisdom of God. (See Romans 8:5-7; 12:2; I Corinthians 2:14; James 3:17.)

When men of faith and godly character counsel together concerning the things of God, He will direct their thinking and decisions. There is safety in counsel of this nature. (See Proverbs 11:14; 15:22.) Paul felt quite confident that he had received the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ by direct revelation from God, but just in case he might have been mistaken on some point, he went to Jerusalem on this occasion to counsel with those to whom God had also spoken by revelation. (See Galatians 2:1-5.)

God's truth is too serious a matter for His ministers to ambiguously or egotistically give out wrong answers by which men may be lost. It is extremely important that all Spirit-filled ministers preach only God's Word by the anointing and inspiration of the Holy Ghost. (See I Corinthians 2:1-8; II Corinthians 4:2-5; I Peter 4:10-11.)

### **Beginning the Second Missionary Journey**

(Verses 36-41)

There were a number of ministers laboring in the church in Antioch at this time. And since the work there

## *Acts*

was well supplied with workers, Paul began to think about the young saints they had left in every city in which he and Barnabas had ministered on their first missionary journey. He felt the need to return to these cities to encourage and revive the saints and to win others to the faith of the Lord Jesus.

He desired and expected Barnabas to accompany him on this second journey. But evidently John Mark had returned to Antioch, perhaps with Barnabas and Paul when they returned from the council in Jerusalem. And Barnabas, very naturally, desired to take his nephew, John Mark, along. Paul, remembering that on the first journey John Mark had become discouraged with the travels and hardships of missionary work and, after a few weeks, had left the party in Perga of Pamphylia, was unwilling to take him on the second journey. Barnabas refused to go without him and Paul refused to take him along. This caused sharp contention between these two wonderful men of God who had worked so harmoniously together for several years.

As a result of their contention, Barnabas took John Mark and sailed for Cyprus, and Paul departed with Silas in the opposite direction, going overland through northern Syria and the province of Cilicia. This route led them first to Derbe, and then to the other cities, in order, where they had left groups of Christian converts from the first missionary journey.

The disagreement between Paul and Barnabas reminds us that they were still human, even though they had been used of God in such a mighty way. James said of the great prophet Elijah that he was a mere man and therefore subject to like passions as all of us. (See James

5:17.) God's Spirit-filled people have the wonderful treasure of the Holy Ghost in these mortal bodies. (See II Corinthians 4:7.) But while we live in mortal bodies, we are all limited in abilities and understanding.

Perhaps we cannot judge either Paul or Barnabas as being wholly right or wholly wrong in this matter. Paul's decision was probably right for him, and that of Barnabas was right for him. Out of their disagreement came two missionary parties instead of one, and God certainly put His blessing on both of them.

Paul was right in his feeling that those who consecrate to the work of the Lord should give themselves unreservedly to it, whatever hardships and privations they may be required to endure. He himself was that kind of man. He never turned aside from any task, no matter how difficult, and never shunned any cross that loomed in his pathway. (See Acts 20:22-24; 21:12-14; II Corinthians 4:8-12; 11:24-30.) But he apparently was wrong in his attitude of unwillingness to give John Mark a second chance.

Barnabas, on the other hand, was the kind of man who always sought to encourage the discouraged and to strengthen the weak. The apostles had surnamed him Barnabas, the meaning of which was "son of consolation," because that name suited his personality. (See Acts 4:36.) He had stood for Saul of Tarsus when the other apostles had been afraid of him. (See Acts 9:26-29.) He had gone to Tarsus in Cilicia and hunted Saul to bring him to Antioch, by which Saul had his first start in the ministry to which the Lord had called him. (See Acts 11:25-26.) And it was in keeping with his character that he should now insist on giving John Mark a second chance to make



*Acts*

good in the ministry of the gospel.

Subsequent records prove that he did the right thing by John Mark. In later years Paul, while he waited in the Roman prison, generously acknowledged this fact by requesting Timothy to bring Mark, who was profitable for the ministry. (See II Timothy 4:11.)

If God demanded absolute perfection, none of us could qualify for His service. But He only requires that we earnestly press toward the perfect fulfillment of His will for our individual lives. (See Philippians 3:12-15.)

# Chapter 16

## **SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY** *(Continued)*

### **The Calling of Timothy**

(Verse 1-5)

On the first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas had come to Derbe from the west, having made a semi-circle by way of Cyprus, Perga, Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, and Lystra. But on Paul's second missionary journey, he and Silas came to Derbe from the east, having traveled overland from Antioch in Syria through northern Syria and the province of Cilicia. From Derbe they traveled on to Lystra and the other cities in order where they had formerly ordained elders over congregations of new converts (Acts 14:21-23).

There was a young man named Timothy in Lystra who no doubt had been converted to Christianity through the ministry of Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey. He had gained a reputation among the brethren of Lystra and also those of the neighboring town of Iconium for his outstanding faith and steadfastness. Perhaps he

## *Acts*

had been helping in the ministry in these local assemblies. Paul recognized in him a potential missionary and minister of the gospel.

A good report (reputation) is very important to those who preach the gospel. The apostles required that the seven deacons to be chosen to serve the church in Jerusalem must be men of honest report (Acts 6:3). Bishops and elders (pastors and ministers) are required to have a good report from those outside the church, as well as among the brethren, so that they may bring no reproach on the work of the Lord (I Timothy 3:7). One who has not lived faithfully and conscientiously as a saint of God and served well in his local church has no right to expect the Lord to entrust him with a more responsible position. Timothy had fulfilled this qualification and God, through the ministry of Paul (I Timothy 4:14-16), called him to a greater service.

Paul desired Timothy to join his missionary party, but there was one difficulty to be overcome. Timothy's mother was a faithful Jewess, but his father was a Greek. And, since no mention was made of his father's faith, we presume he had remained a heathen. Timothy, from childhood, was taught the Old Testament Scriptures and was brought up in the faith of Jehovah (II Timothy 1:5), but since his father was a Greek he had not received the rite of circumcision. His being circumcised would have been his father's responsibility.

Paul knew the Jews would consider Timothy a heathen and would not accept him in their synagogues unless he was circumcised. So Paul required him to be circumcised, not because it was necessary for salvation, but for the sake of his influence with the Jews. To those

who would not otherwise consider him a Jew, he became a Jew that he might win them (I Corinthians 9:20-23). Paul required Timothy to be circumcised for the sake of his influence with the Jews, but he was careful to deliver the decree passed by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem to all the Gentile churches. These churches were built up and established in the faith, and through Paul's evangelistic efforts many new converts were added to them daily.

Paul never married (I Corinthians 7:8; 9:5, 15), and little mention is made of his family ties. He had a sister, whose son aided in his deliverance from the Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 23:16-22), and he mentioned some of his helpers in the ministry as being his kinsmen (Romans 16:7, 11, 21). But he was shown to be a man of deep affection for the saints of God and especially for those who labored with him in the gospel (Romans 16:1-16; Philippians 4:1-3; I Thessalonians 2:8). And he seems to have felt a closer bond with Timothy than with any other person. He whose life was so barren of family ties, adopted Timothy into his heart as a lifelong companion and as a son in the gospel (I Timothy 1:2).

### **The Macedonian Call**

(Verses 6-11)

Paul, for the purpose of encouraging and establishing the saints in the faith, visited all the churches that had been raised up on the first missionary journey. He then traveled, with Silas and Timothy, through the regions of Phrygia and Galatia. This territory embraced most of central Asia Minor (study the map). No particulars of this ministry were recorded but we know that churches were

## *Acts*

established in Galatia, for Paul later wrote his Epistle to the Galatians.

He then desired to go into the western part of Asia Minor, of which region Ephesus was the principal city, but he was shown by the Holy Ghost that this was not God's will. He then thought he should go into Asia Minor's most northern province of Bithynia, but again the Spirit of the Lord restrained him. He was not, at this time, permitted to go either west or north but was led between these two points to Troas on the northwest coast of Asia Minor.

In Troas, the Lord showed him by a vision in the night that he should go into the country of Macedonia, which was northwest from Troas across the northern end of the Aegean Sea. This vision of a Macedonian man asking for help revealed the pressing need, if not the desire, for the gospel in Macedonia at this time and explained why Paul had been restrained from going either west or north but had been led to Troas.

Luke's use of the pronoun "we" in this passage leads us to believe that he joined Paul's party in Troas. Paul and his co-workers, including Luke, prepared immediately to go into Macedonia. They took a boat from Troas and sailed across the northwest corner of the Aegean Sea by way of the island of Samothracia to the Macedonian seaport of Neapolis.

### **Paul at Philippi**

(Verses 12-40)

Paul doubtless was directed of the Lord to begin his Macedonian ministry in Philippi. By preaching in Philippi, which was the chief city of that area, he would sow the gospel seed at the center of the main operations

and interests of the people, from which point it would spread into all that region.

Paul's practice was to begin his ministry in each city among the Jews, usually in their synagogues on the Sabbath day. He sought to win as many of the Jews as possible to the faith of Jesus. But when they rejected the gospel, he took it to Gentiles, in marketplaces and in schools and wherever there was an opening.

There was no synagogue in Philippi, but a few Jews, and perhaps a few proselytes to the Jew's religion, all of whom were women, met to worship the Lord each Sabbath day out by a riverside. So Paul and his helpers quietly waited in the city until the Sabbath day and then met with this group of women by the river. They preached the gospel of Jesus Christ to them, and their first convert was a Gentile proselyte.

Lydia, who was a businesswoman from the city of Thyatira in western Asia Minor (famous for its purple dye), was evidently a Gentile. She must have been a proselyte to Judaism, since she worshiped the Lord with those Jews who met on the Sabbath days. She sold royal purple cloth which she obtained from her home city of Thyatira. She seems to have had a lucrative business and, having financial means, she insisted that the missionaries should come into her home, if they considered her worthy, to be entertained during their stay in Philippi. She understood that Jews did not go into the homes of Gentiles, but she had been a proselyte to Judaism and was now a Christian, baptized in water in the name of the Lord Jesus and filled with the Holy Ghost. So Paul and his company accepted her generous invitation to abide in her house.

The baptism of Lydia and her household is the first

mention made of baptism in relation to the ministry of Paul. But although it was not so stated, we know that all his converts were baptized. He seems to have personally baptized but few (I Corinthians 1:13-17), but he arranged for the baptism of all Christian converts by his co-workers. He preferred not to personally baptize his converts, lest they should get the idea that he desired to win followers to himself. He desired only to win souls to Christ (II Corinthians 4:5). But Paul preached the full gospel of Jesus Christ: repentance (death), baptism (burial), and the receiving of the Holy Ghost by which to walk in the resurrection life of Christ (Acts 9:18; 18:8; 19:1-7; Romans 6:3, 4; Galatians 3:27).

### **Paul Casts Out the Demon of Divination**

(Verses 16-24)

As Paul and his company went regularly to the place of prayer by the riverside, a demon-possessed slave girl followed them, crying that they were the servants of the most high God come to tell the way of salvation. The girl who by demon power was able to tell fortunes was a slave to some unscrupulous men who exploited her demonic power of divination (soothsaying or fortune-telling).

What she said of Paul and his co-laborers was true, but this testimony, coming from a demon-possessed girl, did not help their cause. When she continued to do this for many days, Paul was grieved, for he knew the people of Philippi would come to associate their ministry with the operations of this girl and her masters. Jesus had rebuked the demons that confessed Him to be the Son of God, lest the people should associate His identity with these evil spirits. And Paul, not only for the purpose of

freeing the girl from the bondage of Satan but also for the sake of belying any association with her operations, commanded the evil spirit, in the name of Jesus, to come out of her.

The girl was instantly delivered from this evil spirit. All things are subject to the command of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is Creator of all things. The elements (the wind and the sea) are subject to His command (Matthew 8:27), as well as all unclean (sinful) demon spirits (Mark 1:23-27). And Paul, as Jesus' representative by reason of having been filled with His Spirit, was able to command these demon spirits.

When the girl's masters realized that she had been stripped of her power of divination, they rose up in anger against Paul and Silas, whom they recognized as leaders of the missionary group. They dragged them into the marketplace where the rulers of the city held their court. They had no authority to punish Paul and Silas, but by falsely accusing them they were able to incense the rulers or magistrates against them. They knew just the right tactics by which to stir these officials. They especially emphasized that these men were Jews (most Romans hated the Jews) and accused them of troubling the city by teaching customs which were contrary to Roman laws.

This accusation enraged not only the magistrates but also a multitude of the people. And the rulers, in the spirit of mob violence and without a trial, commanded them to be stripped of their clothing and beaten. The Jews, lest they mistakenly should exceed their limitation of forty stripes, never gave a prisoner more than thirty-nine stripes, but the Romans had no such limitation in their laws. By Paul's own testimony, this was one of the three



times that he was beaten (II Corinthians 11:25).

After Paul and Silas had been beaten with many stripes, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was charged, at the expense of his own life, with their safe-keeping. He, because of the seriousness of this charge, thrust them into the innermost cell of the prison and fastened their feet in stocks. Stocks were instruments of punishment consisting of two timbers, having half-circular cutouts, which clamped over the ankles and held them in a viselike grip.

### **The Opening of the Prison**

(Verses 25-29)

Paul and Silas had every natural reason to be extremely despondent, sitting in a dark inner cell of the prison with their feet fastened in stocks. But by reason of their faith in the leading and the loving care of the Lord, they were able to pray and sing praises to Him at midnight. As they began to pray about their situation, they were made to understand that the Lord had permitted this experience by which to work out His own purpose.

As the two realized that God was in charge of the whole operation, His glory and blessing swept over their souls and they were given a song in the night (Psalm 77:6). They were not afraid of anything the Lord permitted, for they knew they were under His love and protection. They were dedicated to fulfill His will, and they had perfect confidence that their enemies could do nothing except that which He permitted. They were expendable for the cause of the salvation of souls, but they knew they would be rewarded with eternal glories.

We are reminded that the apostles, on the occasion of

their persecution in Jerusalem, rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of their Lord who had suffered for them (Acts 5:41). And Paul and Silas were shortly rewarded for their dedication and zeal.

These dedicated men must have suffered great pain, with their backs bleeding from the terrific beating, except the Lord relieved them miraculously. And we can imagine the surprise and wonder of the other prisoners when they heard them praying and singing at midnight. Paul and Silas, in the blessing of their worship, were not timid about disturbing the other inmates of the prison. It was high time these sinners were disturbed by the Spirit of the Lord.

But before they had time to complain of the disturbance or to cause a commotion, a strong earthquake shook the foundation of the prison. All the doors came open, the stocks were loosed, and all the chains fell from those who were bound. The prisoners suddenly found themselves free, but they were so struck with surprise and perhaps terror for these strange and miraculous events that none of them tried to escape.

When the jailer, who had so securely bound Paul and Silas to prevent their escape, awakened and realized that the prison doors were all open, he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. He knew he would be killed for letting them escape, so he drew his sword to kill himself rather than face execution.

Paul realized what he was about to do and called to him in a loud voice that no one had fled. Then the jailer, sensing the supernatural force in this most unusual situation, called for a light and fell down before Paul and Silas with fear and trembling. The rage of the magistrates,

which had been incited by the master of the demon-possessed girl, had conveyed to the jailer the belief that these men were dangerous criminals. But he was now overcome by his sense of the supernatural presence of God with Paul and Silas. He had now become their prisoner of fear, and they were his captors.

### **The Way of Salvation**

(Verses 30-34)

The jailer seems to have known that Paul and Silas preached the way of salvation. Perhaps he had heard them preach in the marketplace or had heard of their evangelistic activities in the city. And he now wanted to find the way of salvation.

They told him that to be saved he must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. They then preached to him the Word of the Lord which embraced the full gospel message (I Corinthians 15:1-4). They explained what it meant to believe on the Lord Jesus and that one's faith must be expressed by obedience. The jailer and all his household were made to understand that they must repent of their sins (die with Christ), be baptized in His name (buried with Him), that they might receive of His resurrection life (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4).

There is only one way of salvation for all people. Men can be saved only through faith in what Jesus Christ has done, and they must express their faith by obedience to His Word. The jailer and his family believed and obeyed all the words of the apostles. They repented and were baptized immediately, during the early morning hours. This revival took place sometime between midnight and daylight. And we have every reason to believe that these

people were filled with the Spirit of God.

When they came back into the house from the place of baptism, they prepared food for Paul and Silas. But this ministry to their comfort was performed only after the jailer and his household had been led to the Lord, which was of first importance. The jailer had washed their stripes before he was baptized. Surely Paul and Silas considered their beating and imprisonment as well repaid by this revival in the household of the jailer.

### **The Departure of Paul and Silas from Philippi**

(Verses 35-40)

By morning the impulsive rage of the magistrates which had moved them to order the beating and imprisonment of Paul and Silas had cooled, and they sent word to the jailer to release the men and tell them to leave the city. They had not yet learned of that which had taken place during the night hours.

Paul refused to leave Philippi until he had revealed to these officers his knowledge of their unlawful deed. Paul was a free-born Roman citizen, having been born in Tarsus of Cilicia, which was a free Roman colony. We have no record that Silas was a Roman citizen, but he might have been. And it was a serious offense against the Roman government to treat Roman citizens with indignity. Paul sent word to the magistrates that they had beaten Roman citizens and cast them into prison without giving them a trial and that they refused to slip out of the city privily without protesting this unlawful treatment.

When this sobering message was brought to the magistrates, they immediately were much concerned. They now came in fear and humbly begged Paul and Silas to

## *Acts*

depart without making public their unlawful action, which no doubt would have cost them their positions with the Roman government.

After the magistrates' apology, Paul and Silas went to the home of Lydia, where no doubt Timothy and Luke waited for them. Then, after a farewell to the saints, they departed from Philippi.

# Chapter 17

## **SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY** *(Continued)*

### **Paul's Ministry in Thessalonica**

(Verses 1-4)

Paul and his company traveled from Philippi through the Macedonian cities of Amphipolis and Apollonia but seem not to have stopped over to preach till they came to Thessalonica, which was the capital of the Province of Macedonia. Thessalonica was approximately one hundred miles southwest of Philippi. Paul probably chose it for his next field of labor because of its importance as a capital city and also because of its large Jewish population that had erected a synagogue there. Of course, he sought to follow the leading of the Lord in all his travels.

In every place where Paul preached, by divine ordination, he presented the gospel first to the Jews. And after they were given the opportunity to accept or reject the Lord Jesus Christ, he took the gospel to the Gentiles. So for the first three weeks in Thessalonica, on the three Sabbath days, he preached the gospel of Jesus in the

Jewish synagogue and won many converts from among both Jews and Greek proselytes to the Jewish religion.

### **Persecution in Thessalonica**

(Verses 5-9)

Paul's general practice, in every place, of preaching first in the synagogues of the Jews gave opportunity for the honest and sincere among them to become converted before the rebellious Jews could organize their campaigns of persecution. And true to this pattern, many Jews and some Greek proselytes were converted during his first three weeks in Thessalonica.

Those Jews who rejected his message became enraged by the success of his ministry and enlisted the help of some base characters who were easily bribed to create a disturbance, which threw the whole city into an uproar. They led a mob to assault the house of Jason, where Paul and his company lodged. But the missionaries, by the providence of God, were not in the house of Jason when the assault was made.

When they failed to find the missionaries, they dragged Jason and some Christian converts with him before the town council. Their accusation against Jason was that he had received "these men [Paul and his helpers] who have turned the world upside down." This was very descriptive of Paul's ministry of the gospel, except that the world in the grip of sin is already upside down, and only the gospel of Jesus Christ can bring men into their right minds and make their lives upright.

Paul's enemies arrested the attention of the rulers of the city and caused them alarm by accusing the missionaries of preaching that King Jesus opposed the rule of

Caesar. They, of course, had only preached that Jesus was the eternal and spiritual King of His people. However, the city rulers, after taking security of Jason and his friends (perhaps the payment of bail), released them.

### **Paul and Silas Sent to Berea**

(Verse 10)

The persecutors had not been able to apprehend Paul and his helpers by their assault on the house of Jason, but the disciples knew that they would soon make another attempt. So they urged Paul and Silas to leave immediately and sent them, under cover of night, to Berea, which was another Macedonian city about fifty miles southwest of Thessalonica. Perhaps Timothy was left for a brief time with the new converts in Thessalonica.

Paul and Silas left Thessalonica to escape persecution, but they were in no way intimidated. No doubt they sought to obey the instruction of Jesus that when they were persecuted in one city, they should flee to another (Matthew 10:23). On arriving in Berea, they went immediately into the Jewish synagogue to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **The Noble Bereans**

(Verses 11-12)

The Jews of Berea were said to have been more noble than those of Thessalonica, because they heard the preaching of the gospel of Jesus with open and unprejudiced minds and searched the Scriptures daily to determine if it was truth. They searched the Scriptures as a safeguard against being swept into an erroneous doctrine, but by searching the Scriptures they displayed an



earnest desire for truth. These are noble characteristics in any people.

As a result of the Bereans' noble attitude, many of them believed and were converted to the Lord Jesus Christ. Many honorable Greeks also, both of men and women, were converted. It is not recorded how long the missionaries ministered in Berea, but they were there long enough to sow the gospel seed and have a revival. It was perhaps only a few weeks at the most, for as soon as the news of their successful ministry in Berea reached the hostile Jews of Thessalonica, they came to arouse the people of Berea against them.

### **Paul Sent to Athens**

(Verses 13-15)

Paul seems to have been the main target of the Jews' persecution. So when the people of Berea were stirred against him, the brethren sent him away alone by boat, while Silas and Timothy remained in Berea. They seem to have felt the necessity of sending Paul away immediately, but perhaps Silas and Timothy remained to encourage the new converts and to set the church in order before leaving.

Berea was only a short distance from a seaport of the Aegean Sea, and the brethren sent Paul away by boat. Perhaps they reasoned that he would be more likely to escape his persecutors by taking a ship, and it appears that the first ship available was bound for Athens.

As the boat which took Paul to Athens returned again to the port near Berea, he sent a message instructing Silas and Timothy to speedily join him in Athens, but for unknown reasons they did not join him until after he went to Corinth.

**Paul's Ministry in Athens**  
(Verses 16-21)

Paul never wasted time or opportunities. And he was not idle in Athens while waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him. He became very burdened over the state of idolatry in Athens and not only preached Jesus to the Jews in the synagogue but went daily to the marketplace where he preached to the heathen.

In this busy marketplace he was confronted by two different groups of philosophers. The Epicureans' philosophy was that pleasure is the chief object of human existence, and they gave themselves wholly to self-gratification. The philosophy of the Stoics was exactly opposite to that of the Epicureans. They believed that the universe was under an iron law of deity and that conformity of the human will to this law, unmoved by external circumstances or changes, was the perfection of virtue. These philosophers called Paul a babbler, but their attention was arrested as he preached Jesus, whom they understood to be some strange God they had not heard of before.

The philosophers proposed to Paul that he should explain his strange new doctrine before the famous Greek court known as the Areopagus. This court, which held its sessions on the hill of Ares (Mars' Hill) or Areopagus, and from which it took its name, was a court of justice and also a council which was authorized to judge in matters of religion and morals. It was authorized to oppose the introduction of new deities or foreign rites but does not seem to have had authority to prohibit such. It was famous for its very fair and just and unprejudiced decisions. It was presided over by a council of judges who

were called Areopagites.

The citizens of this famed city of culture had become so fascinated and involved with learning that they principally spent their time in searching for and passing on strange news and theories. This attitude no doubt contributed to the fact that the city was wholly given to idolatry. They had embraced all the different gods of the people of all parts of the world and even left a place in their worship for any of which they might not have heard.

### **Paul's Sermon on Mars' Hill**

(Verses 22-31)

Paul began his address before the Areopagus by remarking that he perceived they were very religious. This is the more favored translation of this passage, since it is unlikely that he would have addressed them with the offensive statement that they were too superstitious. He designed the subject matter of his sermon to capture the attention and interest of these heathen intellectuals. He was capable of doing this, since he was familiar with Greek culture and with the history and background of this court. Besides having received the highest education in the law of Moses and Old Testament Scriptures, he, having been born and reared in a Gentile country, was also educated in their learning. He could tell them what their own poets said. But his learning was dedicated to Jesus (I Corinthians 2:1-8).

Paul appealed to the interests of the judges and all others present by taking his subject from an inscription on a shrine which he had passed, probably on his way to Mars' Hill, which read, "To the Unknown God." This inscription was an admission that there might be a God

whom they did not know. And, since there were so many gods in Athens, it was a clear assumption that the only one of whom they had not heard was the true and living God.

Paul knew this God and proceeded to tell the Athenians about Him. He told them that this God had created all things and was the Lord of heaven and earth. He did not dwell in temples made with the hands of men and could not be worshiped with the works of men's hands. Men can give Him nothing, but He gives to all men life and breath and all things necessary to sustain life. He has made all nations of one blood (all men have come from the one strain of Adam).

Perhaps he told them this to allay any prejudice against the Jews' belief that they only were God's people. He then appealed to them to seek the true and living God. He explained that He was omnipresent and within reach of all people in all parts of the world, but to find Him they would need to feel after Him with a real desire to know Him.

The apostle showed that the living God could not be made of gold or silver or stone by the art of man's device. He showed, further, that God required all men to repent of their sins and that He was going to judge all men by that One whom He had ordained to die and be resurrected to atone for their sins. The fact that Jesus Christ had been resurrected was proof that all the world would be judged according to their acceptance or rejection of His salvation. God came to the world in Jesus Christ and redeemed men through His death and resurrection, that all who choose to do so may know Him.

To know God is men's greatest privilege and should be their greatest aspiration. God began a progressive rev-

elation of Himself after men lost the true knowledge of Him through the fall of Adam (Romans 1:21-23). He revealed something of His character in the significance of His names (Exodus 34:5-7), which He demonstrated in His dealing with men. He revealed His terrible majesty and wrath against sin from Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:9-24; Hebrews 12:18-24), and He revealed His will and purpose for men in His law (Exodus 20:1-23). He appeared to some in angelic form and to Moses in the burning bush. But in all these revelations men received only a faint glimmer of His likeness and character.

It remained for God to reveal His true identity in the man Christ Jesus (John 1:1-14; Colossians 1:15-19; 2:9; I Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 1:1-3; I John 1:1-2). In the earthly life and ministry of Jesus we have been given a true picture of God's attitude toward men, of His compassion and longsuffering, and of His power to deliver from the ravages and penalty of sin. Jesus is no longer in the flesh where we can touch Him with our hands and observe Him with our natural eyes, but He has given us a greater revelation of His true character by coming to abide within us in Spirit (John 14:16-20). The world can no longer see Him, but His saints see Him, for He lives within them. And they, in turn, must reveal Him to the world in their godly lives.

God's revelation of Himself to His Spirit-filled people continues to be progressive. He has filled us with His Spirit to guide us into the way of all truth (John 16:12-16). As we walk with Him, we daily learn more of His ways and of His nature. And every fresh insight into the depths of His love fills us with an intense desire for a greater knowledge of Him. Paul, after many years of close association

with Jesus Christ and of devoted service to Him, cried out passionately for a greater knowledge of Him in the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering, that he might fulfill His purpose and attain to the resurrection of the dead (Philippians 3:10-11).

God grant that we all may be filled with that spiritual hunger which will propel us into a deeper experience and greater knowledge of our Lord (Hosea 6:3).

### **The Results of Paul's Sermon on Mars' Hill**

(Verses 32-34)

At the conclusion of Paul's message, the Athenians manifested something of the same attitude as that shown by the Jews toward the demonstration of the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost. Some of them mocked, and some were more or less indifferent. But although his success in Athens was not considered so great as in many other places, he won some very important and substantial converts. Among those converted to Jesus were one of the judges of this world-famed court, Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, who must have been an important person, since her name was recorded.

Paul does not appear to have left an established church in Athens, but the gospel seed that he sowed there took root. Four centuries later the Parthenon, the Temple of Athena, became a Christian church and the Athenians became bitter foes of idol worship. Paul learned by his experience in Athens, as well as in all other places, that the result of his labor was in the hands of the Lord. And he admonished the saints, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (I Corinthians 15:58).



# Chapter 18

## **SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY** *(Continued)*

### **Paul in Corinth** (Verses 1-11)

Paul left Athens soon after his appearance on Mars' Hill before the Areopagus. He traversed the narrow isthmus (about ten miles wide) which connected the mainland of Greece with the Peloponnesus Peninsula. Corinth was about forty miles west of Athens, situated at the west end of the isthmus and on the northeast side of the peninsula. At this time it was the commercial and political metropolis of Greece and the residence of the Roman governor. It was a very wicked city.

Paul had been alone in Athens, and he came alone to Corinth. He seems to have been in need of financial assistance. And, since he had learned the trade of tentmaking, he looked for employment as a tentmaker. He found a Jew named Aquila and his wife Priscilla, who had recently set up a tent shop in Corinth, having been banished from Rome by Emperor Claudius. And he found both employ-



## *Acts*

ment and lodging with them. Aquila and Priscilla were either Christians already before they met Paul, or they were among his first converts in Corinth. And they became his helpers in the ministry of the gospel and his staunch and lifelong friends (Romans 16:3-4).

Jewish parents were careful that each son learned a trade, so that wherever he went he would be able to provide for himself in case of necessity. Paul had been educated for a rabbi, but he had also learned the trade of tentmaking, which he seems to have frequently used during his missionary travels (Acts 20:34; I Corinthians 4:12; I Thessalonians 2:9; II Thessalonians 3:8). His converts sometimes lovingly contributed to his necessities (Philippians 4:10-19), but he chose not to exact anything of them for his personal needs, lest they think that he preached merely for his living. He taught that it was right and proper for God's saints to support those who preached the gospel, but he did not take advantage of this right for himself (I Corinthians 9:7-18).

Paul found employment as a tentmaker to pay expenses, but he had come to Corinth for the sole purpose of preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. His secular work was only supplementary to his preaching Jesus every Sabbath in the synagogue, where he persuaded both Jews and Greek proselytes to find life and hope through faith in Jesus Christ.

Silas and Timothy had evidently been engaged in the work in Berea and Thessalonica, since Paul had left them in Berea when he went to Athens. It is thought by some, because of Paul's statement recorded in I Thessalonians 3:1-2, that they had joined him in Athens and then been sent back to Thessalonica. But since no mention was made

of their coming to Athens in the account of Paul's visit there (Acts 17:14-34), it seems more likely that Timothy was simply sent from Berea back to Thessalonica. And after Paul came to Corinth, they joined him there.

Paul had been preaching regularly in the synagogue of the Jews, but the presence of Silas and Timothy seems to have inspired him to preach Jesus as the Messiah of Old Testament prophecy with renewed zeal and vehemence. Then many of the Jews rejected his message and blasphemed the name of Jesus. They were said to oppose themselves, for they had rejected the only means of their salvation. They expelled Paul from their synagogue, and he, having discharged his full duty toward them, was now free to direct his ministry to the Gentiles. Justus (probably a proselyte to Judaism), who lived next door to the synagogue, invited Paul to preach in his house. And this door which was opened to the gospel of Jesus Christ outside the synagogue probably made the gospel more accessible to both Jews and Gentiles.

Paul's ministry was not curtailed but rather enlarged by this move from the synagogue to the house of Justus. Conversions increased among the Jews as well as among the Gentiles. Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and his family believed on the Lord Jesus and were baptized. It was the position of a synagogue ruler to preside over all assemblies, interpret the law, judge whether things were lawful or unlawful, punish offenders, and solemnize marriages. And the conversion of Crispus who held this responsible position further infuriated the Jews so that they intensified their persecution against Paul. But the Lord appeared to him in a night vision, encouraged him to boldness, and comforted him with His promise of protection. The Lord told him

there was yet a great work to be done in Corinth, and he ministered there for a year and six months.

### **Persecution in Corinth**

(Verses 12-17)

The Jews finally became so enraged against Paul that they caught him by mob violence and dragged him before the judgment seat of Gallio, the governor of Achaia. They accused him of teaching men to worship God contrary to the law (of Moses), which the Roman government had granted them the freedom to observe. But when Gallio perceived that their grievance against Paul was a matter of their religion, he refused to consider their case. He threw the matter out of court before Paul had opportunity to speak in his own defense.

The Jews, by their self-righteous “holier than thou” attitude, had acquired the ill-will and animosity of most Gentiles. And the Gentiles of Corinth seem to have been looking for an occasion against them. So when Gallio angrily drove the Jews from his judgment seat, the Gentiles took this as an excuse to vent their anger against the Jews. They beat Sosthenes, who no doubt had been elected chief ruler of the synagogue after Crispus was converted to Christianity. And Gallio, being unfriendly toward the Jews, made no interference in the matter but left them to the mercy of their persecutors. It is possible that Sosthenes was later converted to Christianity and was the one referred to by Paul in I Corinthians 1:1.

### **Paul’s Return from his Second Missionary Journey**

(Verses 18-22)

Paul remained in Corinth for some time after his ex-

perience of being dragged before Gallio by the Jews. But after spending eighteen months in Corinth, he decided to return to Antioch in Syria. He apparently left Silas and Timothy in Corinth and sailed from Cenchrea, accompanied by Aquila and Priscilla. Cenchrea was located a few miles south of Corinth on the Saronic Gulf, which opened into the Aegean Sea.

Before sailing from Cenchrea, Paul had his hair shorn (cut). He had previously taken a Nazarite vow, the period of which had now expired. The Nazarite vow was one of consecration under which a man voluntarily bound himself for a certain period of time to wear his hair long, to abstain from wine and any product of grapes, and to abstain from contact with the dead (Numbers 6:1-8). When the period of one's vow expired, he would observe certain ceremonies and then shave or cut his hair (Numbers 6:13-21). Paul very likely had taken this vow more for the sake of his influence with the Jews than for his own faith in such ceremonial works (I Corinthians 9:19-23).

Paul, with Aquila and Priscilla, then sailed across the Aegean Sea to Ephesus on the west coast of Asia Minor. And after a short stopover in Ephesus, during which time he preached in the synagogue of the Jews, he hurried on to Jerusalem to be present for the next Jewish feast there. But he promised the Jews in Ephesus, when they desired him to remain longer with them, that he would return later. Leaving Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus, he sailed to Caesarea, and went from there up to Jerusalem. And after he saluted (greeted) the church in Jerusalem, and perhaps had preached to the many Jews gathered there for the feast, he returned to his headquarters in Antioch of Syria.

## **THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY**

### **Paul's Third Visit to Central Asia Minor**

(Verse 23)

Paul, after spending some time (perhaps a few weeks or months) in Antioch, again felt the need to visit the churches in Central Asia Minor, which were the fruits of his first and second missionary journeys. He followed the same route from Antioch over which he had traveled on his second journey. This course led first to Derbe, then Lystra, Iconium, Antioch in Pisidia, and perhaps other cities where, by this time, there were Christian congregations. He ministered to and strengthened all the disciples in this area. He then evangelized the regions of Galatia and Phrygia, which included all the country of Central Asia Minor, where he left other Christian congregations for he later wrote an epistle to the churches of Galatia (Galatians 1:1-2).

### **Apollos Converted**

(Verses 24-28)

Aquila and Priscilla, having remained in Ephesus, continued to attend the synagogue services where they no doubt found many opportunities to witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. And while there, they met an eloquent preacher whom they led to Jesus. Apollos, a zealous Jew from Alexandria, Egypt, came to Ephesus and spoke in the synagogue. He had been converted to the message and the baptism of John the Baptist but, living in a distant land from the little country of Palestine, he seems not to have heard of the death and resurrection of Jesus or of the Pentecostal message. Aquila and Priscilla probably

invited him to their home where they expounded to him the full gospel message of Jesus Christ. He readily believed their message and doubtless was baptized in the name of Jesus and filled with the Holy Ghost.

Apollos learned from Aquila and Priscilla of the church in Corinth of Achaia, and he desired to go there. So they wrote a letter of recommendation to the saints in Corinth and asked them to receive him. And he, being eloquent and very learned in the Old Testament Scriptures, performed a very commendable work among the Jews in Corinth. He later was involved indirectly in a division in the church in Corinth but not from any fault of his own. The Corinthian division resulted from carnality after the Christians had lost their first love (I Corinthians 1:11-13; 3:1-8). Paul cited carnality as the basic cause of envy, strife, and divisions among the saints of God (I Corinthians 3:3).



# Chapter 19

## **THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY** *(Continued)*

### **Paul's Return to Ephesus**

(Verses 1-7)

When Paul had left Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus, he had promised to return (Acts 18:21). And after Apollos had been converted through the ministry of Aquila and Priscilla and had gone to Corinth (Acts 18:24-28), Paul came to Ephesus from the regions of Galatia and Phrygia in Central Asia Minor.

His first ministry in Ephesus was to a congregation of twelve men who, like Apollos, were disciples of John the Baptist. His first concern for these men, to whom the Lord by some means had led him, was whether or not they had received the Holy Ghost. John the Baptist had preached that the Messiah, who would shortly come, would baptize His disciples with the Holy Ghost and fire (Matthew 3:11). And Jesus, just before His ascension into heaven, had sent His disciples back to Jerusalem to wait for that which John had preached (Acts 1:4-5).



But these disciples of John did not know of the ministry or the death and resurrection of Jesus and had not heard of the coming of the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost. So Paul preached the gospel of Jesus to them. They readily obeyed and were filled with the Holy Ghost, speaking with tongues and prophesying. During Jesus' earthly ministry, those who more readily accepted Him as the Messiah were disciples of John (Luke 7:28-30). Now John's ministry, which had seemingly ended in defeat, was still bearing fruit.

### **Paul's Ministry in the Synagogue**

(Verse 8)

Paul, after baptizing the twelve disciples of John, went into the Jewish synagogue and preached boldly for three months. He disputed with those who opposed his doctrine and persuaded those who were sincerely concerned for the things of the spiritual kingdom of God in Jesus Christ (Acts 1:6-8; Luke 17:20-21; John 3:1-8; 18:36; Romans 14:17; Colossians 1:13-14). When he had previously stopped in Ephesus on his way to Jerusalem (Acts 18:19-21), the Jews had desired to hear more of his gospel. It was probably due to this unusual interest among the Jews that he was able to minister unhampered in their synagogue for three months. But the opposition of some finally forced him out, as it had done elsewhere.

### **Paul's Ministry in the School of Tyrannus**

(Verses 9-10)

Those Jews who rejected the gospel of Jesus became hardened and hostile and began to work against Paul, speaking evil of the Christian way before all the people.

When Paul could no longer work harmoniously among them, he went out of the synagogue, taking with him all the disciples he had won to the faith of Jesus.

When the door of the synagogue was closed to him, God opened another door. A man named Tyrannus, who was probably a Gentile convert, invited him to preach in his school. He continued to preach with perfect liberty in this school for two whole years. His ministry to both Jews and Greeks in this place was so effectual that the gospel message spread into all Asia. Perhaps Paul himself visited some of the neighboring cities, and Christian converts carried the gospel to other communities, until it covered the whole area. Altogether, Paul ministered in Ephesus for three years (Acts 20:31). This was the longest period spent in one place during all his missionary endeavors and was doubtless the most far-reaching and widespread.

### **The Miracles of Paul's Ministry**

(Verses 11-20)

Paul's ministry was confirmed and supported by the miraculous power of God. He refused to depend on natural talents or education (I Corinthians 2:1-5; Philippians 3:4-9) but recognized himself as only an instrument in the hand of the Lord. It was because of this attitude that the Lord was able to perform His work through His apostle.

Many miracles of healing were performed through Paul's ministry. The people came to believe that if they could obtain a handkerchief he had used or an apron he had worn (while making tents) to lay on the diseased, they would be healed.

Paul did not anoint his garments and send them out to be placed on the sick. There was no more virtue in his

## *Acts*

garments than in Peter's shadow (Acts 5:15). The apostles emphasized that the sick were not healed by their own holiness or power but by the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 3:12-16; 14:8-15). However, God honored the faith of the people, and many were healed in the shadow of Peter and with Paul's handkerchiefs and aprons laid on them.

Many who benefited by such by-products of the gospel, as healing and other physical and material blessings, failed to understand the real purpose and source of these blessings. Some onlookers attributed the healings and miracles to the magic tricks of sorcerers and exorcists: Simon the sorcerer had tried to buy the power of bestowing the Holy Ghost, from Peter and John (Acts 8:18-21).

Seven Jewish brothers, who were exorcists, who attempted to cast out devils by magic, thought that Paul used the name of Jesus merely as a magic word. They attempted to use the "name of Jesus whom Paul preached" to command the evil spirits to come out of a mentally deranged, devil-possessed man, but they were miserably defeated because they did not know the Jesus whom Paul preached and did not have the authority of His name (verses 13-16). However, the power of the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified by this incident, since the deception of the exorcists was uncovered.

Ephesus, being wholly given over to idolatry, abounded with exorcisms, magical arts, and sorceries, as evidenced by the great number of books in which these curious arts and magic tricks were taught. But when the mighty power of the Holy Ghost was demonstrated, these magic tricks were shown to be false. Many who had practiced these deceptions were converted to the faith of Jesus and made

a great bonfire of their books, which altogether were valued at fifty thousand pieces of silver. The fifty thousand pieces of silver cannot be definitely estimated by our monetary system, but it evidently amounted to considerable wealth. And the burning of the books which represented such vast wealth was a demonstration of the zeal and sincerity of the Christian converts and of the extent and success of Paul's ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **Paul's Plans to Leave Ephesus**

(Verses 21-22)

Paul, after he had laid a good foundation and experienced a revival, could no longer be content to remain in a city when there were so many other cities still in heathen darkness. So, after three years of outstanding success in Ephesus, he made plans to return to Macedonia and Greece. After he visited the churches in these areas and had made another visit to Jerusalem, he hoped to go to Rome. He sent Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia, that they might encourage and strengthen the saints, and he expected to follow them shortly.

### **The Silversmiths Provoke a Riot**

(Verses 23-41)

Ephesus was the center of the worship of the goddess Diana, whose image was said to have dropped out of heaven. The magnificent temple which had been erected to the worship of Diana in Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the world. This sinful and immoral religion was also highly commercialized. Many silversmiths had become rich by making and selling miniature silver

## *Acts*

shrines of Diana. But Paul's revival of Christianity had made great inroads on their business. The many converts to the faith of Jesus Christ no longer bought these silver emblems, and this resulted in great financial loss to the craftsmen. The silversmiths were not so much concerned for the religion of Diana as for the loss of their business, but they made the worship of Diana the excuse for their demonstration.

Demetrius, by appealing to his fellow craftsmen, stirred up a riot against Paul and soon had the whole city in a confused uproar. The mob caught two of Paul's companions, men who had come from Macedonia to aid in the work in Ephesus. When Paul tried to go to their aid, the other disciples held him back from the danger. The rioters then caught a Jew named Alexander, who was probably a Christian convert.

The townclerk was finally able to quiet the mob. He diplomatically assured the multitude of people that the city of Ephesus still worshiped Diana but that they were in danger of being called in question by the Roman government for this rash outburst, since the Christians against whom they had demonstrated had committed no crimes. He then dismissed the assembly, and the mob dispersed.

Verse 23 states that there arose no small stir about "that way." It was no coincidence that the revivals which resulted from apostolic ministry were spoken of in every place as "that way." Paul himself, before his conversion, obtained authority from the high priest to arrest any he found of "this way" in Damascus (Acts 9:1-2; 22:4-5). But he afterward confessed that after "the way" which the Jews called heresy he worshiped God (Acts 24:14). The

Jews of Ephesus who rejected the gospel of Jesus spoke evil of “that way” (Acts 19:9). The Roman governor Felix was said to have had greater knowledge of “that way” since his wife was a Jewess (Acts 24:22-24).

The Christian way is not merely a doctrine but a way of life. It is the new and living way of salvation (Hebrews 10:19-20), which is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (John 14:6). And it is no wonder that the enemies of the cross of Christ have done their utmost in every age to defeat “this way.”



# Chapter 20

## **THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY** *(Continued)*

### **Paul's Second Visit to Macedonia and Greece**

(Verse 1)

Before the uproar in Ephesus, Paul had planned a second visit to Macedonia and Greece. He had sent Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia, intending to follow them shortly (Acts 19:21-22). But perhaps the uproar caused by the silversmiths over the worship of Diana hastened his departure from Ephesus. He seems to have always taken any severe outbreak of persecution as a signal from the Lord that it was time to move on to other fields. So soon after the townclerk quieted and dismissed the mob, he had a farewell meeting with the disciples and left for Macedonia.

Luke gave a very brief account of Paul's ministry in Macedonia on this occasion (verse 2), but there is much more implied in this brief statement "those parts," over which he said Paul had gone, including all the cities in Macedonia where he had preached the



## *Acts*

gospel and left congregations of Christians during his visit on the second missionary journey (Acts 16:6-40; 17:1-14). This would surely have embraced Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea; and he may have visited other cities also. Luke further recorded that he gave them much exhortation.

We can judge something of the rich truths of doctrine and practical admonition in these exhortations by a study of his epistles to these churches. While he was a prisoner in Rome, he wrote to the saints in Philippi that he thanked God on every remembrance of them and prayed daily for them (Philippians 1:3-7). After expressing his deep love for them, he admonished them to increase in love, knowledge, justice, and the fruits of righteousness (Philippians 1:8-11). He wrote to the saints in Thessalonica that he prayed always for them and commended them for their work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope (I Thessalonians 1:2-3). He mentioned that he had previously admonished them to walk worthy of God, which admonition they had received as from the Lord (I Thessalonians 2:11-13).

Paul went from Macedonia to the city of Corinth in Achaia (Greece). Before leaving Ephesus, he had written the church in Corinth that he would come to them from Macedonia (I Corinthians 16:5). We may discern something of the nature of his ministry at this time to the church of Corinth from his first epistle to them, written from Ephesus, and his second epistle, written sometime after this visit to Corinth. He reproved them for carnality and sought to correct many errors in doctrine and practice (I Corinthians 1:4-13; 3:1-17; II Corinthians 1:13-24; 12:14-21; 13:1-14).

## **THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY (Return Trip)**

### **Paul's Plan Changed**

(Verses 3-5)

After three months in Corinth, Paul prepared to return to Antioch in Syria, by way of Jerusalem. He intended to sail from Cenchrea, but on learning that the Jews laid wait for him at this seaport, intending to assault him, he changed his plan and returned overland through Macedonia. He and his fellow workers traveled back through Berea, Thessalonica, and Philippi.

### **Paul at Troas**

(Verses 6-12)

Paul and Luke remained in Philippi a few days after the other members of the party had departed for Troas. We learn from Luke's use of the pronoun "we" that he was with Paul at this time. Paul and Luke left Philippi after the days of unleavened bread (Passover season) and, after five days of travel by boat, joined their company at Troas, where they remained for another seven days. On their last evening there they met with the disciples of Troas in a third-floor room where they had a memorable meeting. They probably met for the purpose of breaking bread in the Communion service.

Paul, feeling the need to impart to the disciples many truths and admonitions in this last service, preached till midnight, when his sermon was interrupted by a serious accident. A young man who sat in a window, having fallen asleep, fell to the ground from this third-floor window. He was killed, but when Paul embraced him, praying the prayer of faith, his life returned to him. After this

miracle, the group returned to the upper room, where they broke bread. Paul then finished his sermon, preaching till daylight.

### **Paul's Charge to the Ephesian Elders**

(Verses 13-38)

Paul's desire to walk from Troas to Assos, nineteen miles south of Troas, while his companions went by ship, gives a further insight into his manner and practice of personal devotion to the Lord. He evidently chose to walk those nineteen miles in order to be alone for the purpose of meditation and prayer. And this incident was another revelation of the secret of his dedication and strength of character.

He joined his party on the ship at Assos, and they sailed southward between the mainland of Asia Minor and the islands off the west coast of Asia Minor, until they arrived at Miletus, a city on the mainland about thirty-five miles south of Ephesus. This part of the journey was approximately four days by boat from Troas. Paul purposely bypassed Ephesus because he desired to reach Jerusalem in time for the next Feast of Pentecost. He knew that if he stopped in Ephesus, his many friends would consume so much of his time he could not reach Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. So he chose to call only the elders (ministers) of the church in Ephesus to meet him in Miletus. This meeting was doubtless one of the most inspirational, and yet one of the most pathetic, of his ministry.

When Paul met the elders in Miletus, he prepared the way for the charge he desired to give them by reminding them of the sincerity and zeal with which he had minis-

tered for three years in Ephesus. He sought to teach them dedication to the Lord's work by his own example. He showed them that he was now on his way to Jerusalem in answer to the call of the Lord, even though the Spirit had witnessed that he would endure bonds and afflictions when he reached Jerusalem.

Paul never shirked duty to escape persecutions or hardships. He did not seek the line of least resistance but faced whatever was in the line of duty, in obedience to the call of the Lord. He testified that he was ready and willing, not only to endure persecutions, but to die the death of a martyr, if necessary, to fulfill the ministry to which the Lord had called him. Because he made this dedication, he was able to say at the end of his earthly life that he had fought a good fight, he had finished his course, and he had kept the faith, for which he would be crowned with eternal life (II Timothy 4:6-8).

Paul did not know all that would befall him in Jerusalem, but he sensed that he would not be able to return to Ephesus (verse 25). However, he had discharged his full duty to Ephesus and was free from the blood of all men. He borrowed this figure of speech from the language that God used to impress on Ezekiel his responsibility to the people of Israel (Ezekiel 3:17-21; 33:7-9). He realized that he could only be justified of the Lord by doing all in his power to win men to the Lord Jesus Christ through the ministry of His gospel (I Corinthians 9:16-18). He considered himself to be indebted to all men for the great gift of grace and life that he had received from the Lord (Romans 1:13-15).

Paul had fully discharged his personal responsibility to Ephesus, but he still felt responsible to provide for the

## *Acts*

proper ministry and leadership to carry on the work in his absence. For this purpose he charged the elders of Ephesus with the responsibility of the ministry he had begun in Ephesus. He showed them that the Holy Ghost had made them overseers and nourishers of the church of God and that they were now responsible to carry on the work in Ephesus. He warned that grievous wolves (false teachers and would-be leaders with carnal ambition) would seek to destroy God's people. And he reminded them that he had warned the people of these things night and day with tears during the three years he had labored in Ephesus. He encouraged them to lean heavily on the Lord, who would build them up and give them grace for the task. And he then warned them, by again citing his own example, not to serve for carnal reward but for the love of souls and to fulfill the call of the Lord.

Luke, after recording Paul's message and charge to the Ephesian elders, described the very touching scene of their farewell prayer meeting. As they knelt to pray, the elders, who were Paul's own converts and children in the Lord, wept and embraced and kissed him whom they loved as a father for the work he had performed among them. They sorrowed, no doubt, because of the witness of the Spirit that he was going to suffer afflictions in Jerusalem; but they sorrowed most because he had said they would not see his face again.

Natural separations from those we love are always sad, but for God's people who have hope of eternity, they are not final. We shall all be gathered to Him, and so shall we ever be with the Lord (I Thessalonians 4:17-18).

The elders then accompanied Paul to his ship, and he took his departure.

# Chapter 21

## **THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY (Return Trip)**

### **The Journey from Miletus to Jerusalem**

(Verses 1-16)

After Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders at Miletus, he and his party continued their journey southward, apparently on the same ship. They docked overnight on the island of Coos, and again on the island of Rhodes, from whence they sailed to the port of Patara on the southwest coast of Asia Minor. From Patara they took another ship which sailed on a straight course to the seaport of Tyre on the coast of Phoenicia.

In Tyre they found a group of Christian disciples and tarried with them seven days. And as they met in worship with these saints, the Spirit of the Lord again witnessed that Paul was going to suffer persecution when he arrived in Jerusalem. His friends misunderstood this witness as a warning that he should not go to Jerusalem, but Paul did not so interpret it. When it was time for the missionaries to leave Tyre, the saints there accompanied them to the

ship. And after a prayer meeting on the shore, they resumed their journey.

They sailed from Tyre to Ptolemais, where there was also a congregation of saints. After spending one day with them, they sailed to Caesarea. In Caesarea, Paul and his party were entertained in the home of Philip the evangelist, who many years before had been appointed as one of the seven deacons to serve tables in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-6). Philip had settled in Caesarea and now had four daughters who prophesied.

Paul's company tarried in Caesarea for a number of days, during which time the Spirit of the Lord again witnessed, through the prophet Agabus, that Paul would be bound in Jerusalem. Again Paul's friends, including Luke, implored him not to go to Jerusalem. But he felt definitely that his going to Jerusalem was in the plan of God. He asked the saints plaintively not to weep and to break his heart, for he was willing to die for the name of the Lord Jesus if it should be God's will. They then ceased remonstrating and surrendered to the will of the Lord. Some of the disciples of Caesarea accompanied Paul and his companions to Jerusalem, among whom was an old Christian from Cyprus, named Mnason, who apparently had a home in Jerusalem and planned to provide lodging for Paul and his friends.

### **Paul's Attempt to Appease the Hostile Jews**

(Verses 17-26)

Paul and his company were given a glad welcome by the saints in Jerusalem.

On the day following his arrival in Jerusalem, a meeting was arranged with James, who was the recognized

head of the body of Christians, and all the elders. At this meeting Paul reported to them of his victorious missionary work among the Gentiles, for which they gave glory to the Lord.

Although James and the elders were happy to greet Paul and happy for the great work he had done, they were apprehensive for his welfare in Jerusalem. They knew of the unfriendly attitude toward him of many Christian Jews (those who believed) who continued to hold rigidly to the law of Moses and of the open hostility of the non-Christian Jews. It had been rumored among them that Paul taught the Jews they should not circumcise their children, but this rumor was untrue. He did not try to interfere with the Jews' practice of the law of Moses but taught only that circumcision was unnecessary for salvation and that it should not be required of Gentiles. He taught that those who considered circumcision essential to salvation had fallen from grace (Galatians 5:1-4). James and the elders, in an attempt to avoid violence, advised him to purify himself ceremonially with four men who were observing the ceremony of terminating their Nazarite vows.

The Nazarite vow was one of voluntary consecration. Anyone desiring to take this vow could do so for a self-chosen period of time. For the period of the vow he must let his hair grow long, he must not drink wine or eat any form of the fruit of the grape, and he must not defile himself by touching a dead body (Numbers 6:1-21). The Lord ordained Samson to be a Nazarite all the days of his life (Judges 13:2-5). And Hannah dedicated her son Samuel to become a Nazarite from his birth (I Samuel 1:10-11). But except for these two men and John the



Baptist, it was purely a voluntary vow to be terminated at the end of the period for which it was taken.

Paul took this vow while in Corinth, evidently for the sake of his influence with the Jews, and terminated it before he sailed from Cenchrea (Acts 18:18). This was evidently the vow which these four men were terminating, with whom Paul went through the ceremonies of purification. James and the elders hoped that the Jews, seeing Paul observe these ceremonies, would conclude that he observed the law of Moses and would be appeased toward him. But they also reaffirmed their conviction concerning the decree they had previously made on the question of circumcision (Acts 15:19-29). Paul then obeyed their advice and observed the purification ceremonies with the four men.

## **PAUL'S ARREST IN JERUSALEM**

### **Paul Seized by the Jews**

(Verses 27-30)

The purification ceremonies for the termination of the Nazarite vow lasted seven days. But just before the conclusion of the seven-day period in which Paul had taken part with the other four men, the hostility of the Jews against him broke loose, having been ignited by a group of Jews from Asia. There were Jews living in all parts of the world, and many of them came to Jerusalem for the main yearly feast days, of which Pentecost was one of the more important. On this occasion, a group of Jews from Asia, probably from the city of Ephesus which was the most important city of that region, stirred up violence against Paul. They were certainly familiar with his three

years of ministry in Ephesus, and they had recognized Trophimus, a Gentile from Ephesus (Acts 20:4), as he walked with Paul in the streets of Jerusalem. When they saw Paul in the Temple, they assumed that he had brought Trophimus also into the Temple. The Jews forbade uncircumcised Gentiles to enter their Temple grounds on penalty of death. The word that Paul had brought a Gentile into the Temple quickly spread and set off a riot.

The law of Moses permitted only the high priest to enter the Most Holy Place of the Temple and only the priests to enter the Holy Place (Hebrews 9:6-7). Gentiles were excluded from all associations with the people of Israel except they became proselytes by circumcision (Leviticus 20:26; Joshua 23:6-8). God ordained this strict separation of His people from the people of heathen nations, lest they become contaminated with heathen idolatry. But the Israelites became self-righteous and built a religious wall around themselves in an attempt to shut out all other people from favor with God.

Their attitude was symbolized by the sacred enclosure which surrounded all their Temple courts and which excluded all Gentiles on penalty of death. This was the middle wall of partition which Paul said was broken down by Christ (Ephesians 2:14-18) to admit those of all nations into the favor of God on the common ground of faith in Jesus Christ. Paul knew that the so-called sacred enclosure around the Temple courts could not separate men of faith from God, but he was far too wise to attempt to take a Gentile Christian within that wall. The Jews' false accusation and vicious attack on him was wholly unjustified.

The false accusation of these Asian Jews quickly

## *Acts*

ignited the smoldering embers of Jewish hostility against Paul, and the whole city was moved with mob violence. A great crowd gathered at the Temple and dragged Paul out of the Temple grounds into the Court of the Gentiles, shutting the doors behind them. The Jews would not pollute their holy Temple grounds (which Jesus said was ordained to be a house of prayer, but they had made it a den of thieves), but in the outer Court of the Gentiles they intended to kill Paul. This was the court outside the sacred enclosure, where Gentiles were permitted to gather.

Their dragging Paul into this court was by the providence of God, for this area was in full view of the Roman garrison (the castle) and accessible to the Roman (Gentile) soldiers. This castle, manned by a Roman guard, was situated on a higher elevation at the northwest corner of the Temple grounds. As soon as word of the mob reached the captain of the guard, he dispatched soldiers to the scene, who rescued Paul from the bloodthirsty Jews.

The captain naturally supposed that Paul was a very dangerous criminal, to have gained such animosity from these religious people, and commanded him to be bound with chains. He then demanded of the Jews who he was and what he had done, but he received only many confused accusations from the angry mob and not a single sane answer. So he commanded him to be carried into the castle. To reach the castle, it was necessary to ascend a stairway. As Paul was being conducted up this stairway by the soldiers, the violence of the Jews, who were still determined to kill him, was so great that the soldiers were forced to carry him physically up the stairs to the castle where, although a prisoner, he would be safe from the angry mob.

At the top of the stairway, just before entering the castle, Paul surprised the captain by speaking to him in the Greek language. The captain had supposed he was a notorious Egyptian who had before caused much trouble as the leader of four thousand murderers. But Paul informed him that he was a Jew of Tarsus of Cilicia, of respected citizenship, and he asked permission to speak to the Jews. When the captain granted his request, he was again surprised when Paul began to speak to the Jews in the Hebrew language.



# Chapter 22

## **Paul's Defense Before the Jews**

(Verses 1-21)

Paul's first concern was for the defense of the gospel of Jesus Christ. God had called him to witness to and to defend His gospel (Acts 9:15), and he had dedicated his life to fulfill this call (Philippians 1:17; I Corinthians 9:16-17). If he had thought only of his own safety, he would not have come to Jerusalem at this time. He had come, knowing that trouble awaited him, to testify of the gospel of Jesus to the Jews. He carried a heavy burden of intercession before the Lord for his own countrymen, the Jews, to be saved (Romans 9:1-3).

Even now, knowing that they sought every opportunity to kill him, he thought not so much of defending himself as of defending the gospel of Jesus Christ. He greatly desired this opportunity to speak to them about Jesus before being shut up in prison, but he did so under the guise of making his own defense. When he was given permission to speak, he arrested their attention by speaking to them in the Hebrew language, which was their own lan-

guage. This was not the pure Old Testament Hebrew but a dialect of the Hebrew called the Syriac, which was the language spoken by the Jews at this time. They could have understood Paul if he had spoken to them in Greek, but by speaking to them in their own language he sought to identify himself with them. And he carried this same intention throughout the theme of his speech.

Paul had just identified himself to the chief captain as a Jew. And he now identified himself to the Jews as a Jew and verified the fact by speaking to them in their language. He had been born in Tarsus of Cilicia but was brought up and educated in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel, who was perhaps the most distinguished Jewish teacher of the law of Moses of that day. And, having been taught by this great teacher, he not only had been indoctrinated in the letter of the law but had instilled in him a holy zeal for the law of Moses.

Paul reminded the people that this zeal had driven him to persecute the disciples of Jesus to the extent of consenting to the death of some, even as the Jews were now persecuting him. He reminded them that the high priest had many years before given him authority to go to Damascus to bring the Christians bound to Jerusalem (Acts 9:1-2). And his mention of this incident led naturally into the testimony of his miraculous conversion on the road to Damascus on that same occasion. If Paul had thought only of justifying himself before the Jews he would not have given this personal testimony, for that experience, which had changed the whole course of his life, had been the root of all his troubles with the Jews. But as he had been zealous for the law of Moses, he was now more zealous for the gospel of Jesus Christ and des-

perately desired to convince the people of his own nation that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

When he began to speak to the Jews in Hebrew, he caught their attention, so that they listened in rapt silence as he told of the great light that had shined upon him, of his falling to the ground, and of the Lord (God) who spoke to him, identifying Himself as Jesus. He told how he was led blind into Damascus to the house of Judas, on Straight Street, where God sent Ananias to pray for him, baptize him and give him His special call. He then spoke of the time he had returned to Jerusalem after his conversion, and how that, after a brief stay of fifteen days (Galatians 1:18), he had been forced to leave suddenly because of a plot of the Jews to kill him (Acts 9:26-30).

By rehearsing his prayer at that time, he reminded them that he had consented to the stoning of Stephen and had held the coats of those who stoned him. He revealed that at that time the Lord told him to leave Jerusalem, for He would send him to minister to Gentiles in far countries.

### **The Jews' Hostility Toward Gentiles**

(Verses 22-24)

The Jews had listened spellbound to Paul's testimony of his miraculous conversion to Christianity until he stated that God had called him to minister the gospel of salvation to Gentiles. The mention of his going to Gentiles sent them into a wild and angry demonstration. They lost all self-control and, tearing off their outer garments, threw dust into the air, by which act they indicated their hatred of Paul and their desire to tear him to pieces.

The chief captain commanded that Paul be brought



## *Acts*

into the castle for his own safety, as well as for his safe-keeping. He naturally thought Paul must be a very dangerous criminal to draw such a wild demonstration of hatred from the Jews.

When God raised up the nation of Israel, He ordained their strict separation from the heathen Gentile nations as a safeguard against their being contaminated by idolatry, with all its attendant sins. The people of Israel were forbidden to intermarry or to make any league with heathens.

But in the course of their history, Israel lost sight of the purpose of this separation and became self-righteous in their position as God's chosen people. They refused to have any dealings with Samaritans and looked down on Gentiles as dogs. The Samaritan woman at Jacob's well was greatly surprised that Jesus, a Jew, would ask her, a Samaritan, for a drink of water (John 4:7-9). And Jesus, by way of testing the faith of the Syrophoenician woman, told her that it was not proper to take the children's bread (that which belonged to the Jews) and cast it to dogs (Gentiles). He simply echoed the attitude of the Jews toward Gentiles, of which she was fully aware. But in her great faith in Jesus' power to heal her daughter, she was willing to accept this stigma in order to receive the blessing of Israel's God (Matthew 15:21-28).

These two examples revealed the self-righteousness and pride of the people of Israel. And in this attitude they refused any concept that Gentiles, except by becoming proselytes to Judaism by circumcision, could have any part with Jehovah God. Their hatred of Paul, who had opened the kingdom of God to Gentiles through the gospel of Jesus Christ, grew out of this root of pride and

jealousy. When Paul preached in Jewish synagogues in various Gentile countries, the Jews sometimes seemed favorable to him until he offered the hope of the gospel to Gentiles, on which occasions they became hostile (Acts 13:42-48; 17:1-5; 19:8-9). Paul later wrote to the Romans that the Jews' eyes had been blinded (only after they rejected Jesus), and that through their fall (from God's favor), salvation had come to the Gentiles (Romans 11:10-27).

### **Paul's Roman Citizenship**

(Verses 25-30)

The chief captain, believing Paul to be a dangerous criminal, ordered him to be bound and then beaten until he confessed his crime. But as the soldiers began to bind him with thongs (narrow strips of leather), he indicated to the centurion in charge that he was a Roman citizen and that he was familiar with the Roman laws which protected its citizens.

The centurion was immediately much concerned and advised the chief captain to reconsider his command to beat this man, for he was a Roman citizen. The laws of the Roman government forbade the binding or beating of a Roman citizen, and it also forbade the punishment of any prisoner without giving him a fair hearing (trial). So when Paul revealed the fact of his Roman citizenship, these officers immediately changed their attitude toward him, fearing lest they become liable to the Roman government.

Paul had before used the fact of his Roman citizenship to bring the magistrates of Philippi to make amends for his unlawful imprisonment and beating in that city but only after the conversion of the jailer and his household,

## *Acts*

which had resulted from his experience (Acts 16:35-40).

The chief captain then came personally to Paul to ask about his Roman citizenship. He himself had had to buy this privileged position, but Paul told him he was a free-born Roman citizen. Paul's birthplace of Tarsus in Cilicia is said to have been made a free city in a special grant by Augustus Caesar, by reason of which its residents became Roman citizens. Most of the then-known world was under Roman rule, but the people of the various provinces which had been conquered by the Romans had retained their own citizenship, and it was a rare privilege to be a free-born Roman citizen. This favored position was an advantage to Paul on at least three occasions during his missionary travels. And it was a tremendous advantage on this occasion.

Those who were to have beaten him, in fear, ceased to carry out this operation. And the chief captain, fearful of the consequences for having bound him, reversed his orders and, from that time on, showed Paul every consideration. It was his responsibility to learn for what crime he was accused and to give him a fair trial, but he determined to protect him from the wrath of the Jews. So on the following day he arranged a meeting with the council of the Jews (Sanhedrin) and brought Paul down to appear before them.

# Chapter 23

## **Paul's Defense Before the Sanhedrin**

(Verses 1-10)

The chief captain had been unable to determine the charges the Jews made against Paul. So on the morning after Paul had spoken to the people from the top of the stairs, he brought him down to appear before the council. And when he was given the opportunity to speak, Paul introduced his defense by declaring that he had lived in all good conscience before God to the present time. He hoped to convince the council, and all the Jews, that he had not given up his faith in Jehovah by believing in Jesus but rather that he had found Jehovah in Jesus.

When Paul had spoken these words, the high priest commanded those who stood near to strike him on the mouth, by which he registered his scorn of the idea that one who believed in Jesus could live before God in good conscience.

It was the responsibility of the high priest to judge every man fairly and impartially and to consider every man innocent until proven guilty. But Ananias profaned

## *Acts*

the holiness of his high office by his scornful injustice. Thus he came under the same condemnation of God as those priests whom the prophets charged with judging for reward (Micah 3:11) and with doing violence to His law (Zephaniah 3:4).

Paul's rebuke (verse 3) was not a retaliation for a personal affront but was from a spiritual discernment of Ananias' character and was prophetic of the judgment of God that would overtake him. He, by the discernment of the Holy Ghost, looked beneath the surface of the high priest's scorn and injustice and saw that he was corrupt from the core of his nature. Ananias professed to be God's representative to the people, but his profession was shown to be hypocritical in his corruption of the position to which he had been ordained.

Paul used the same term to describe Ananias' hypocrisy that Jesus used of the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus said they were like whited sepulchres which were beautiful on the outside but within were full of corruption (Matthew 23:25-28). Their religious piety was only a whitewash on the outside to try to cover up their wicked designs and oppression of the people (Matthew 23:1-14).

The members of the council who accused Paul of reviling the high priest were in perfect agreement with and partakers of his hypocrisy. We are reminded of God's charge against Judah, through the prophet Jeremiah. He said, "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so" (Jeremiah 5:31). Isaiah said of the sinful nation of Judah, "the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint" (Isaiah 1:5).

The whole nation of the Jews, except for the faithful remnant, had again rejected God and His holy law when they rejected Jesus and His apostles and preachers. When Jesus revealed their inconsistency and injustice, they had inflicted violence on Him, as they now did to Paul (John 18:19-24). Jesus had defended the truth of His statement.

Paul did not retract his condemnation of Ananias, but he acknowledged his respect for the office of high priest, which had been ordained of God, even though he could not respect the person of Ananias (verse 5). He sincerely told them that he had not known Ananias was the high priest. By political maneuvering, there had been a rapid succession of high priests since the time of Caiaphas. Paul had been absent from Palestine, except for occasional visits, so that he did not know who was high priest at that time.

The very first words of Paul's defense before the council were viciously attacked, but he did not let this discourage him. As he looked over the council, he discerned that many of the members were Sadducees. The Pharisees were the greater and more powerful sect of the Jews, but there were also many Sadducees among the members of this ruling body known as the Sanhedrin.

Paul was, of course, well aware of the frequent hostile clashes between the Pharisees and Sadducees over their theological differences. And he no doubt was inspired of the Lord to inject the question of their doctrinal differences into this situation, in order to split their forces.

It is a law of God infused into His creation that "United we stand, divided we fall." And it is also infused into His creation that the forces of evil are weakened because they cannot cleave together (Daniel 2:40-43). It

## *Acts*

was in accordance with this law that God confused the languages of those evil men who aspired to build a tower that would reach into heaven and build a name for themselves (Genesis 11:1-9).

Paul did not create the differences between the Pharisees and Sadducees but simply won an advantage for himself by reminding them of their differences. When he reminded them that he was a Pharisee and that it was for the Pharisees' hope of the resurrection that he was now being examined of them, the Pharisees immediately felt more akin to his doctrinal belief than to that of the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. So a fight broke out in the council between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the chief captain was again forced to rescue Paul who, being caught in the midst of this struggle, was in danger of being pulled apart.

The Pharisees and Sadducees were the two main sects (religious bodies) among the Jews, and, of the two, the Pharisees were the more spiritual. They believed in the resurrection of the dead, in angels, and in spirits, and they held rigidly to the Levitical law, except that they had added many oral interpretations of the law, which they called the traditions of the elders. Jesus' condemnation of them was not for their belief in spiritual things but rather for their self-righteousness and hypocrisy. Before Paul's conversion, he had prided himself on the fact that he was a Pharisee and a Hebrew of the Hebrews (Philippians 3:4-9), but he now counted this natural glory as loss for the sake of Christ.

The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection from the dead and consequently did not believe in future

rewards or punishments. They believed in the law of Moses but had nothing in view more than the temporal blessings of this present life.

### **The Lord Appeared to Paul**

(Verse 11)

Paul considered the presentation of one's body as a living sacrifice to the Lord to be the reasonable service of every Spirit-filled saint (Romans 12:1). He had surely given himself to the Lord in this measure and lived in constant touch with Him. He communed with Him in daily prayer.

But in times of great crisis and uncertainty, Paul was encouraged and given clear and perfect direction by appearances of the Lord in visions. When in a state of uncertainty in Troas, the Lord spoke to him in a vision and made him know he was to go to Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10). The Lord again spoke to him in a vision when the Jews of Corinth viciously opposed him, and assured him that no man should hurt him but that he was to boldly declare His gospel (Acts 18:9-10). He now appeared to him to assure him he would be delivered from the Jews and would yet preach His gospel in Rome.

Later, when in the midst of the stormy Mediterranean, with no natural hope for survival, the Lord stood by him in the night and again told him he would be brought safely to Rome and that there would be no loss of any man's life on the ship (Acts 27:21-25). This promise was miraculously and gloriously fulfilled.

When one has committed the keeping and the direction of his life wholly to the Lord, he can live through all the storms of this life in a state of quiet peaceful calm and assurance (Philippians 1:21-26).



**Paul Delivered from the Jews' Conspiracy**  
(Verses 12-35)

Religion without God makes men into cruel fanatics. In mad fanaticism, many have committed atrocious crimes under the guise of defending their religion. And the Jews, in the name of patriotism and religious zeal, had developed into self-righteous zealots who imagined that any deed committed in the defense of their laws and traditions was justified of God. Jesus had warned His disciples that such fanatics would put them out of the synagogues, and even kill them, in the belief that they were doing God's service (John 16:1-3).

In this spirit, more than forty Jews, determined not to be thwarted in their purpose by the Roman guard, bound themselves under an oath not to eat or drink till they had killed Paul. These fanatics were convinced that the majority of the Sanhedrin and Jewish people were in agreement with them in their purpose, so they confidently sought the help of the high priest to carry out their plot. On the morning after Paul had appeared before the council, they proposed to the high priest that he ask for Paul to be brought down again, under the pretense of questioning him more fully concerning their charges against him. But they only wanted to get him outside the safety of the castle. As soon as they had access to him, they meant to assassinate him.

The chief priests and elders were very agreeable to their atrocious plot. There were doubtless some members of the council, such as the former Joseph and Nicodemus (Luke 23:50-51; John 7:50-52), who did not consent to this wickedness but who dared not voice their opposition to the ruling majority.

God had already appeared to Paul the night before to assure him of divine protection in the face of the Jews' determination to kill him, and He was set to defend His apostle against all their wicked designs. He providentially caused Paul's sister's son to overhear their plot. As they laid their plans, they either had not noticed the presence of the young lad or had presumed that he had no interest in their conversation. But this young man went immediately to the castle and was permitted to speak to Paul. When he had revealed the plot of the Jews, Paul asked that his nephew be taken to the chief captain. Then when he had privately revealed the plot to the chief captain, he was charged to tell no one that he had spoken to him of this matter.

The chief captain went into action, making rapid but definite plans to save Paul from the Jews. He gave orders for two hundred armed soldiers and seventy horsemen to be made ready to depart from Jerusalem at the third hour of the night (9:00 P.M.), that they might spirit Paul out of Jerusalem under heavy guard and cover of darkness. He then wrote a letter to the Roman governor Felix in Caesarea, explaining that he had rescued Paul, who was a Roman citizen, from the Jews and that he was giving them orders to present their charges before his court in Caesarea.

The foot soldiers went as far as Antipatris, which was approximately two thirds of the distance to Caesarea, possibly thirty-five to forty miles from Jerusalem. They then returned to Jerusalem, and the horsemen transported Paul on to Caesarea. Felix was also impressed when he learned that Paul was from Tarsus, in the Province of Cilicia, and promised to hear his case when his accusers had followed to Caesarea.



# Chapter 24

## **Paul's Trial Before Felix**

(Verses 1-9)

We can only imagine the dismay and disappointment of the Jews when they learned that Paul had been taken to Caesarea and committed to the jurisdiction of the Roman governor Felix. The group who had vowed that they would not eat or drink till they had killed him undoubtedly found some excuse to break their vow, and save themselves from starvation, but they never gave up their determination to kill him.

Claudius Lysias, the chief captain of the Roman guard in Jerusalem, informed the Jews that they would have to make their charges against him before the governor in Caesarea. And five days after Paul had been transported to Caesarea, Ananias, the high priest, and the elders of the council went to Caesarea, taking with them an orator (lawyer) named Tertullus to plead their case.

When they arrived in Caesarea, Felix convened court and brought Paul before his accusers. Tertullus began his oratory by slyly flattering the governor, who, of course,

was to judge the case. He expressed lavish praise for the quietness and favors the Jews had enjoyed under his rule. He then, assuming an apologetic attitude, accused Paul of being a pestilent fellow (a profligate person), of stirring up seditions and insurrections, and of being a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.

The inhabitants of Nazareth were called Nazarenes. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, in fulfillment of Micah's prophecy (Micah 5:2), but He grew up in Nazareth and was always referred to as "Jesus of Nazareth" (Matthew 21:11; John 1:45; 18:5; Acts 2:22; 3:6). He had dwelt in Nazareth by the providence of God, to fulfill the prophecy that He should be called a Nazarene (Matthew 2:23). We have no record of a prophecy using those exact words, but the prophets did emphasize that He should be called the BRANCH (Isaiah 4:2; 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Zechariah 3:8; 6:12), by which He should be identified as the Son of David. And the meaning of the name "Nazareth" was "branch," so it appears that His being called a Nazarene fulfilled this rather obscure prophecy. This name was also associated with His followers who preached His doctrine, so they came to be called the sect of the Nazarenes.

Tertullus also accused Paul of profaning the Temple, by which he no doubt referred to the false accusation that he had taken the Gentile Trophimus into the Temple (Acts 21:27-29). And he very adroitly misrepresented the true state of affairs. He made no mention of the fact that the Jews, by mob violence, had dragged Paul out of the Temple into the Court of the Gentiles, where they would have beaten him to death if the Roman soldiers had not rescued him. He said only that the Jews took him

(arrested him) with the intention of judging him (by trial) by their laws. He then charged the chief captain with taking Paul from them by great violence, but, in truth, it was the violence of the Jews that forced the captain to rescue him by the use of soldiers.

The Jews hated Paul because he was doing great damage to their position as religious leaders by his preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And they were very angry with Lysias for thwarting their purpose to kill him. When Tertullus concluded his charges against Paul, the high priest and elders concurred with all that he had said.

### **Paul's Answer to Tertullus' Charge**

(Verses 10-21)

After Tertullus had presented the Jews' charges against Paul, Felix gave him the opportunity to answer their charges. His answer was a concise and consistent masterpiece. Jesus had promised that when His witnesses were brought before governors and kings He would give them what they should answer (Matthew 10:17-20). And He surely anointed Paul in all his encounters with his enemies.

Paul now refuted every charge that Tertullus had made, and created, by his answer, a perfect background for the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He did not flatter the governor, as Tertullus had done, but expressed sincere gratification for the opportunity to present his defense before Felix, who was in a position to understand the nature of his case, having been judge over the people of Israel for a number of years.

Felix was familiar with the Jewish feast days and understood when Paul stated that only twelve days before

## *Acts*

he had gone to Jerusalem to worship God on the occasion of the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 20:16). He explained that he had worshiped in an orderly way, according to the laws and ceremonies of the Jews. He had not disputed with any concerning his doctrine of Jesus. And he emphatically asserted that the Jews had no proof for the charges they had made against him.

Paul did not deny his faith in Jesus, either before the Jews or before this court of the Romans. He confessed voluntarily that after the way they called heresy (the acceptance of Jesus as the promised Messiah), he worshiped the God of his fathers. He again sought to make it plain that he had not given up his faith in Jehovah but had found Him in Jesus (Acts 9:3-6; Colossians 1:15-19; I Timothy 3:16). He still believed all the things which had been written in the law and the prophets but had learned that it was Jesus of whom all the Old Testament Scriptures had testified (John 5:39). He again declared his hope in the resurrection of the dead (of which he had now received assurance through the resurrection of Jesus—Romans 1:3-4). He knew Jesus was alive forevermore, because he had met and talked to Him on the Damascus road and many times thereafter.

Paul had a strong belief in, and great respect for, conscience. He had testified before the Jews that he lived in all good conscience before God (Acts 23:1). He would not make any statement which his conscience would not bear witness to (Romans 9:1; II Corinthians 1:12). And he strongly taught that one should never act against his conscience (Romans 13:5; I Corinthians 10:25-28). He taught that one should be careful not to wound or offend the weak conscience of another (I Corinthians 8:1-13).

He showed the tragedy of permitting one's conscience to become seared, as with a hot iron, till he could no longer feel the prick of God's Spirit for his wrongdoing (I Timothy 4:1-2). And he emphasized the value and blessing of a good (clear) conscience before the Lord (I Timothy 1:5, 19; Hebrews 13:18; II Corinthians 4:2; I Peter 3:16).

He further taught that men can possess a good conscience, free from a sense of guilt, only by the forgiveness and purging of their sins through the blood of Christ (Hebrews 9:14; 10:22). And he now testified before Felix that he exercised himself (put forth a determined effort) to keep his conscience clear in his relationship with God and with men.

Paul concluded his defense by explaining that he had gone to Jerusalem to present an offering to the needy of his own people, the Jews, and that the only activity he had engaged in was that of purifying himself in the Temple (Acts 21:23-26). He pointed out that his accusers could not identify a single offense, unless they considered his crying out to the council that he was a Pharisee, emphasizing his belief in the resurrection, an offense (Acts 23:6). He then closed his testimony before Felix on the note that he had been called in question by the Jews for his belief in the resurrection, which of course involved his belief in the resurrection of Jesus.

### **Felix Adjourned the Trial**

(Verses 22-23)

Felix, after hearing Paul's testimony, manifested an understanding and sympathetic attitude toward him. The statement that he had more perfect knowledge of "that way" probably referred to his knowledge of the way and



mannerisms of Judaism, although he doubtless had heard of Jesus and the Christian way also. He was greatly impressed with Paul's mien and speech but perhaps deferred to give a judgment of the case in favor of Paul, for fear of offending the Jews.

Further, Tertullus had inadvertently given him a strong reason for deferring the case. He had made a rather serious charge against the chief captain Claudius Lysias, and Felix could not now make a proper settlement of the case until he had brought the captain in to defend himself against the charge of Tertullus. So Felix adjourned the trial until a later date when the captain might appear to testify for himself.

There is no record that Felix ever held a second trial for Paul. But while he waited for an opportune time when all the persons involved would be present, he showed Paul every favor and courtesy. He gave him every liberty to meet with his friends (his fellow workers and brothers in Christ) and for them to minister to his needs and comforts. And, by the design of God, Paul found favor and was given special consideration and favors by all those who had jurisdiction over him during his long imprisonment (Acts 27:3, 29-36, 41-44).

### **Felix Privately Inquired of Paul**

(Verses 24-26)

Felix had been genuinely impressed with Paul's defense, and some days after he had adjourned the trial, he came with his wife Drusilla to inquire of him privately. Drusilla was a Jewess, which fact no doubt accounted for Felix' greater knowledge of the Jews' religion. But his purpose in this interview with Paul was to learn of the

doctrine of Jesus. And of course, it was the purpose of Paul to preach and teach the gospel of Jesus at every given opportunity.

With great zeal and anointing he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment, as he explained to Felix the gospel of Jesus Christ (John 16:7-11). The convicting power of God, through the preaching of the gospel, caused Felix to tremble, but he was unwilling to pay the price for salvation in Christ which Paul urged upon him. He seems to have swayed between two opinions for a time. But by deferring his decision, he gained time to fight off the convicting power of God, and his baser nature prevailed over his desire for peace of soul.

Felix promised Paul he would hear him again at a convenient season. And he did come to him many times thereafter, but he was never again moved on by the Holy Ghost as on that first occasion. His subsequent visits with Paul came to be motivated by a secret desire that Paul would finally offer to bribe him with a large sum of money to release him. But no such intention ever entered the mind of the saintly apostle Paul.

### **Felix' Governorship Expired**

(Verse 27)

Two years after Paul was sent from Jerusalem by Claudius Lysias to Felix in Caesarea, Felix' term as governor expired, and he was succeeded by Festus. Felix never gave Paul a second trial, but through his many private interviews with him he was definitely convinced of his innocence. However, to please the Jews, he left him in prison, so he came under the jurisdiction of Festus.

Paul had reason to have become discouraged, being

## *Acts*

denied justice from the Roman court and knowing that he could hope for nothing more than continued hatred by the Jews. But as David of old (I Samuel 30:6), he must have encouraged himself in the Lord. He perhaps remembered the message of the Lord that Ananias had given him at the time of his conversion in Damascus, that he must bear His name before Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel (Acts 9:15-16). His experience as a prisoner was giving him opportunities which he had not before had to bear the name of the Lord before kings and rulers. He could not have forgotten the assurance of the angel of the Lord in Jerusalem that he would be brought to Rome (Acts 23:11).

During his many missionary travels, Paul had learned to commit the direction of his life into the hands of the Lord, and he never lost faith that He would in His own way accomplish His will. Paul's two years as a prisoner under the rule of Felix seem to have dragged on somewhat monotonously and might have drifted on in this same pattern indefinitely, if there had not been a change in the office of governor. But as soon as Festus became governor, things began to change for Paul.

# Chapter 25

## **Paul's Trial Before Festus**

(Verses 1-12)

The Jews had been under foreign rule since the time of the Babylonian captivity by Nebuchadnezzar (II Chronicles 36:15-21; Jeremiah 39:1-14). The Babylonian kingdom was conquered by the Medes and Persians during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, Belshazzar (Daniel 5:1-31). And Cyrus, the first great king of the Medo-Perisan world empire, made a decree for the Jews to return to Jerusalem, rebuild their Temple and reestablish their worship of Jehovah (II Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-11).

This fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, given two hundred years before it came to pass. He had called Cyrus by name and had foretold that he would cause Jerusalem to be rebuilt (Isaiah 44:26-28; 45:1-4). And the Jews' return to Jerusalem by the decree of Cyrus also fulfilled Jeremiah's prophecy that after seventy years of captivity, they would return to their homeland (Jeremiah 25:8-14; 32:14-15).

Although the Jews were permitted to return and carry

## *Acts*

on their religious affairs, they had not become an independent nation to the time of Christ, at which time they were under Roman rule. During the time of Christ's ministry on earth, and during the apostolic period of the early church, the central provinces of Judaea and Samaria were under the rule of Roman governors. Caesarea had been established as the residence of the governor and the Roman capital of these provinces, but Jerusalem remained the religious capital of the Jews.

Felix, who had ruled the Jews for a number of years and who had married a Jewess wife, seems to have been more familiar with their religious ceremonies, as well as with their many prejudices against Gentiles and various groups among their own people (Acts 24:10-24).

Festus, who had been sent from Rome to replace Felix, was probably unfamiliar with their manner of life. It was perhaps for this reason that after only three days in office he went to Jerusalem to become acquainted with their leaders and to learn as much as he could that might help him in his new relationship with them.

The Jews had probably made strong attempts to get Felix to return Paul to Jerusalem but without success. Now that Festus was governor, they renewed their efforts to have Paul brought out from the safety of the prison in Caesarea. As soon as Festus came to Jerusalem to woo their goodwill, they bombarded him with the petition to bring Paul back to Jerusalem. They pretended that they wanted to try him in Jerusalem by their own religious laws, but this was only an excuse to get him out in the open so they could assassinate him. They had never given up their determination to kill him at any cost. And they insistently sought the favor of Festus to themselves

against Paul by stressing their many charges and grievances against him.

Festus rejected their petition and required them to come to Caesarea to present their charges before the Roman court.

When Festus returned to Caesarea, after remaining in Jerusalem for more than ten days, a delegation of Jews went to Caesarea to formally present their charges against Paul before the Roman court. Their basic charges were no doubt the same as those presented by Tertullus in Paul's trial before Felix (Acts 24:1-9), but they had probably added many other grievances, which of course they could not prove (Acts 24:13; 25:7).

Paul had only to reassert his earlier claim that he was not guilty of the charges made against him. Festus seems already to have discerned that he was innocent of the charges, but he courted the favor of the Jews at this beginning of his governorship. And to please them, he asked Paul if he would be willing to return to Jerusalem to be tried before himself as the judge.

Paul knew the nature and the tactics of the Jews, as Festus did not. He knew, by intuition and perhaps by revelation, that they had not given up their determination to kill him. He knew also that he had every right, as a Roman citizen, to be protected from them by the Roman government. He emphasized that he was not trying to escape a just penalty for wrong, but he told Festus that he (Festus) knew he was not guilty but was only bowing to the will of the Jews in suggesting that he return to Jerusalem. And with that declaration, he asserted his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to the supreme court of Caesar in Rome.

Festus, after conferring with the council (probably

the chief captains and principal men of the city—verse 23), gave the verdict that he should be sent to Caesar. He, of course, could not do otherwise, for he had no authority to reject Paul's appeal. This move was undoubtedly by the providence of God, who had before ordained that Paul should go to Rome.

### **Agrippa's State Visit to Festus**

(Verses 13-27)

King Agrippa was Herod Agrippa II, the son of Herod Agrippa I, who had killed James the brother of John and imprisoned Peter (Acts 12:1-25), and a great-grandson of Herod the Great. His father, Herod Agrippa I, who had died by the judgment of God, had been made king over all Palestine by the Roman emperor Claudius but had reigned in this capacity only three years, when God struck him down for his wickedness (Acts 12:23). After his death, his son Herod Agrippa II was made king over the northern and eastern provinces of Palestine, but the central provinces of Samaria and Judea were again put under a Roman governor. So when Festus became governor, Herod Agrippa II with his sister Bernice came to Caesarea to pay him a courtesy state visit.

The Herods were Edomites, but they were classed and recognized with the Jews, having assumed to embrace the Jews' religion. So Festus, hoping that Agrippa might advise him concerning his relationship with the Jews and how he might wisely deal with Paul's case, told him of the prisoner Paul and of his appeal to Caesar. He emphasized that the Jews had made no criminal charges against him but only of questions concerning their religion, and especially referred to a man named Jesus, whom the Jews said

was dead but whom Paul affirmed to be alive. He told Agrippa that since he did not understand these religious questions, he had asked Paul if he would return to Jerusalem to be judged before the court of the Jews, but that he, rather than return to Jerusalem, had appealed to Caesar.

Agrippa became very interested in Paul's case and expressed a desire to hear him. And Festus was very pleased to arrange such a hearing in the hope that he might yet determine his responsibility in the case of Paul.

The following day Festus arranged for Agrippa and Bernice to hear Paul speak for himself. They came with great pomp into the courtroom where was gathered the chief captains and principal men of the city, who no doubt made up the council of Festus' court.

Festus introduced Paul to this audience as the man whom all the Jews claimed should not be permitted to live any longer. But he stated that he himself had found him guilty of nothing worthy of death. He told them that Paul had appealed to Caesar, and he had determined to send him to Caesar, but he was in the embarrassing position of having no charge to make against him. He had a prisoner whom he could not release and was committed to send to the emperor, but he had no charge to make against him to the emperor. And he now hoped that Agrippa, who was familiar with the Jews' religion, might help him to determine some crime with which to charge him.





# Chapter 26

## **Paul's Witness Before Agrippa** (Verses 1-32)

Festus, in his introductory speech to the court, presented Paul to King Agrippa (Acts 25:24-27). And when Agrippa gave him permission to speak in his own defense, he answered that he was happy to answer the charges the Jews had made against him before the king. Agrippa professed to worship Jehovah according to the Jews' religion, and Paul knew he was familiar with the doctrines and customs of the Jews and with the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah.

The Jews' history and religion constituted an essential background for Paul's defense, since their charges against him grew out of his faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah. His defense, which involved his faith in Jesus, embraced a brief resume of his life from the time he had come from Tarsus to Jerusalem to begin his formal education and a full account of his conversion to the faith of Jesus Christ.

Paul, being the son of a Pharisee (Acts 23:6), had

## *Acts*

been reared and educated in the doctrines and faith of the sect of the Pharisees (Philippians 3:4-6), which was the most strict in doctrine and the most spiritual sect of the Jews. He had studied to become a rabbi under the famous Jewish rabbinical teacher Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). And Paul, in his own rights, had become well known among the ruling class of the Jews and even among the laity. The fame of his zeal for the law of Moses, and his persecution of the disciples of Jesus, was widespread. His sincere faith and zeal in the religion of the Jews had doubtless laid the foundation in his personality for his Christian faith and zeal which he demonstrated after he met Jesus.

Paul defined his defense as his stand for the messianic hope of Israel, which he had been convinced was fulfilled in Jesus. And the main body of his defense was the testimony of his miraculous conversion to the faith of Jesus. He had testified of this experience to the Jews from the top of the stairway which led into the castle of the Roman garrison just after he had been rescued from the Jews by the Roman soldiers (Acts 21:40; 22:1-16). Now he again related the story of his conversion before Agrippa and the court of Festus.

The central thought of his testimony, as was true of all his preaching, was the fact of the resurrection of Jesus. He, like all the Jews except the disciples of Jesus, had thought Jesus, who had been crucified by the Jews, was dead until he met Him on the Damascus road. But now he knew that He was alive forevermore. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead, and Paul asked Agrippa why it should be thought incredible that God should raise the dead.

Paul then proceeded to tell how he had heard the

voice of Jesus speaking to him out of the heavenly light that had shined upon him as he came near the city of Damascus and that the speaker had identified Himself as the Lord (Jehovah). From that day, he had surrendered his life to the Lord Jesus, and three days later he had been baptized by Ananias and had received the Holy Ghost, by which experience his mind had been transformed and the whole course of his life changed.

He had then gone forth in obedience to His call to preach His gospel to the Gentiles, as well as to the Jews. He emphasized that the gospel of Jesus was ordained to open the eyes of the spiritually blind, to turn them from the darkness of sin to the light of righteousness, from the power of Satan to the power of God, and to give forgiveness of sin and the inheritance of the sanctified.

Paul, after relating his miraculous vision in which he had heard the voice of Jesus speaking out of the light which was brighter than the noonday sun, assured Agrippa that he could not have failed to obey the call of God out of that heavenly vision. And he told him that it was his obedience to the heavenly vision that had so angered the Jews that they caught him in the Temple and would have killed him if God had not saved him. God saved him by means of the Roman soldiers who rescued him from the Jews and had preserved him to the present time in spite of the persecutions of his many enemies.

Paul had become consumed with the love of Jesus and a passion for lost souls. Like the experience of the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 20:9), the Word of God was as a fire in his bones which constrained him to spread it abroad. A dispensation of the gospel had been committed to him, and he knew the dire consequences if he failed to

## *Acts*

preach it (I Corinthians 9:16-18). However, he did not preach from fear of punishment but was constrained by the love of God and a burning compassion for the souls of men (I Corinthians 9:19-23; II Corinthians 5:13-15).

The main theme of Paul's testimony before Agrippa was the gospel of Jesus Christ. He showed that Moses and the prophets had foretold that Christ would suffer and rise from the dead to give light (salvation) not only to the people of Israel but to the Gentiles (all nations). The gospel of Jesus Christ, which Paul defined as the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (I Corinthians 15:1-4), was the foundation message of all apostolic preaching.

It should also be the foundation message of all Christian preaching today, since it is the only means of salvation for men of all ages (Romans 1:16). The message of the gospel of Jesus is one of power (I Corinthians 2:1-5). It bore fruit in apostolic times, and it will bear fruit today when it is preached in the power of the Holy Ghost.

The power of Paul's anointed testimony before Agrippa and the court of Festus gripped their hearts with conviction. Agrippa was familiar with the Jews' history and religion and had doubtless heard of the crucifixion of Jesus; but Paul's testimony of the suffering and resurrection of Christ was very strange and unfamiliar to Festus, who had only recently come into the province of Judea. He recognized that Paul was highly educated and concluded that he must have become mentally unbalanced by so much learning. But Paul assured him that he was not mad. He had spoken passionately but had spoken only words of truth and soberness. He called on King Agrippa to verify the fact of the story of Jesus, for the story of His life and crucifixion was well known throughout the coun-

try of the Jews. His ministry and death had been publicly witnessed, but His resurrection had been witnessed by only His disciples (Acts 10:40-43). Paul then earnestly appealed to Agrippa to believe on the Lord Jesus as the Christ of whom the prophets had spoken.

His zeal and passion, as well as his words of truth and logic, so moved Agrippa that he was almost persuaded to become a follower of Jesus. But, like many others have done, after coming to the very brink of salvation he refused this greatest of all opportunities because he was unwilling to sacrifice all for Jesus (Matthew 10:39).

Paul not only pled with Agrippa to believe on the Lord Jesus but directed his plea to all who were present in the courtroom. But Agrippa brushed aside his insistence and rose to his feet to signify that the subject was closed. Then the governor and Bernice rose, and all others in the room rose with them, so that Paul had no opportunity to press his gospel invitation further. These people who were considered important among men did not realize that they had just rejected an invitation to become sons of the King of kings and Lord of lords, and citizens of heaven for eternity.

Agrippa and Festus held a private conference concerning Paul, and both agreed that he had done nothing worthy of the sentence of death for which the Jews had insisted. Agrippa concluded that he might have been set at liberty if he had not appealed to Caesar. But now that he had appealed to the supreme court of Caesar in Rome, which was his right as a Roman citizen, Festus was under obligation to send him to Caesar.

The subsequent experiences of Paul proved that his appeal had been made by the providence of God. God had

## *Acts*

ordained that he should go to Rome (Acts 23:11), and no doubt He had willed that he should go under the peculiar circumstances which were to develop out of his being sent to Rome as a prisoner.

We shall study those circumstances in the last two chapters of Acts. Sometime later, when Paul was a prisoner in Rome, he wrote to the church in Philippi that all the experiences through which he had gone had been effectual in furthering the gospel of Jesus (Philippians 1:12-14).

# Chapter 27

## PAUL'S JOURNEY TO ROME

### The Journey from Caesarea to Crete

(Verses 1-13)

During the two years that Paul was held a prisoner in Caesarea by Felix, he was treated with courtesy, and his friends were permitted to visit him and minister to his needs (Acts 24:23).

It appears that Luke was one of those friends who remained in Caesarea to be near him and minister to him. Since Luke was the author of the Book of Acts, we know by his use of the pronoun "we" that he was with Paul when he sailed from Caesarea. When the arrangements had been completed and the time appointed for Paul to be sent to Rome, Luke also took passage on the same ship to accompany him.

Aristarchus of Thessalonica, another friend and doubtless a convert of Paul, also went along with him on this journey. Later, in Rome, Paul spoke of Aristarchus as being his fellow prisoner (Colossians 4:10), but it does



not appear that he was a prisoner at this time. He had been one of Paul's helpers and a companion in travel since the time of his ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:29).

The ship on which the centurion with the prisoners and passengers sailed from Caesarea was one of Adramyttium. Adramyttium was a port on the northwest coast of Asia Minor and was probably the destination of this ship, but the centurion intended on the way to transfer his company to another ship which would be sailing to Rome. There were a number of other prisoners, along with Paul, who had been committed to the charge of the centurion Julius.

They sailed north from Caesarea along the coast of Palestine and Phoenicia and docked the following day at Sidon, which was an important seaport of Phoenicia about seventy miles from Caesarea.

Paul surely possessed a friendly and congenial personality, for he was also treated courteously by Julius and given liberty to visit his friends in Sidon. And, of course, he possessed the grace of God by which he found grace in the eyes of all with whom he had association.

From Sidon, because the winds were unfavorable to sailing in the open waters of the Mediterranean, they sailed between the mainland of Phoenicia and the island of Cyprus. And, after rounding the east end of Cyprus, they sailed between Cyprus and the southern coast of Asia Minor, off the coasts of the provinces of Cilicia and Pamphylia, until they reached the city of Myra on the coast of the province of Lycia. This was a familiar region to Paul, since Tarsus in Cilicia was his birthplace, and he had preached in Perga of Pamphylia (Acts 14:24-25).

At Myra the centurion, not desiring to sail further

north into the Aegean Sea, transferred his prisoners and passengers to a merchant ship from Alexandria, Egypt, which was evidently bound for Rome with a load of wheat from Egypt (verse 38). Because of the heavily loaded ship and the stormy weather, they were forced to sail slowly, so that it took many days (an undetermined number of days) to reach the port and island of Cnidus, which was approximately one hundred and thirty miles west of Myra.

When they reached this point, the weather was too stormy for them to enter the harbor, so they sailed southward toward the island of Crete. They sailed around the cape of Salmone at the east end of Crete and docked at the port of Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea, which was about midway of the southern coast of the island of Crete. Crete, lying east and west, is about one hundred and forty miles long and thirty-five miles wide.

The journey thus far had consumed considerable time, and it was now past the time of the Jewish atonement day fast, which was celebrated on the tenth day of the seventh month (Leviticus 23:26-28). This answers to the latter part of September by our calendar and was the time of the year when stormy weather made sailing on the Mediterranean hazardous.

Paul's warning against sailing from Fair Havens at this time was not prompted so much because of the time of the year, as by a warning from the Spirit of God. He had perceived, by divine revelation, that there would be much damage to the ship and its cargo and great danger to the lives of all on board.

The centurion, who was unaware of Paul's divine association and source of information, considered that the master and owner of the ship should know more

*Acts*

about sailing weather than this prisoner. And since Fair Havens was not a convenient or comfortable place in which to spend the winter, both he and the ship's crew desired to reach the more commodious port of Phenice, which was possibly thirty-five miles farther west, near the west end of the island of Crete.

They waited in Fair Havens, hoping for a break in the weather. And when there was a day in which the south wind blew softly, they felt quite confident that they would be able to reach the port of Phenice. They loosed the mooring of the ship and sailed westward, keeping as close to the coast of Crete as possible, to avoid running into rough water.

The soft south wind soon became a gale, and before they could reach Phenice it became tempestuous and reached tornado velocity, which seems to have been the meaning of Euroclydon.

They were unable to control the ship against this wind, so they folded the sails, which in such a storm were more hazardous than useful, and left it to drift in the storm. The gale carried it southward toward a small island called Clauda. They seem to have been able, by great effort, to anchor the ship temporarily before being swept onto the shoals and sandbars of the island.

While in this location, they undergirded the ship by wrapping cable rope around its hull to strengthen it against the violence of the sea. After they had done all they could, they took in the anchor and raised the sails briefly to put out to sea away from the island. They then left it to drift with the wind.

The following day, after being tossed on the waves without any control of the ship, they lightened it by

dumping some of its cargo into the sea. On the third day they threw out the ship's tackling which now seemed to be useless. Then they continued to be tossed and driven by the storm, without any knowledge of their location since they could see neither sun nor stars by which to determine their direction. And after being tossed in the storm for about fourteen days (verse 27), they lost all hope of being saved, except for Paul, whose hope was in the Lord.

### **Paul Again Advised the Centurion and Crew**

(Verses 21-37)

Paul was evidently the only man on the ship who did not lose hope. He was dedicated to perish in the storm if this was God's time and way to take him home (Philippians 1:21-25), but he no doubt remembered the night the Lord appeared to him in the castle in Jerusalem and told him he must go to Rome (Acts 23:11). He knew the Lord, in whom he trusted fully, would fulfill His will.

However, he did not express his hope to the other men until the Lord again appeared to him with a message of assurance. The Lord's second message that he should be brought before Caesar in Rome also involved all those on board the ship. Perhaps it was in answer to Paul's prayers that the Lord promised to save all the men on the ship.

Paul now stood before the centurion and captain and officers and reminded them that they should have heeded his advice not to sail from Fair Havens. He did not refer to that experience in an attitude of "I told you so" but rather to induce them to believe this second message he was going to give them. He then told them how the Lord

## *Acts*

had appeared to him in the night and told them that all the men would be saved but the ship would be lost. He admonished them to take hope and be of good cheer for he believed God would fulfill all that He had said. God had showed him that they would be cast on an island. And on the fourteenth night, perhaps soon after Paul had told of his visitation from the Lord, the shipmen discerned that they were nearing land. They sounded and found the ocean floor to be twenty fathoms deep and a little farther they sounded again and found it to be fifteen fathoms, so they knew they were nearing land. But in the darkness they were afraid of running on rocks so they cast out anchors and waited anxiously for the light of day.

Some of the shipmen were so anxious to get off the ship and find the land that they undertook to let down the lifeboat while pretending to cast out anchors. But Paul discerned what they were doing and told the centurion that they would be lost if they did not remain in the ship. And perhaps the safety of all on board would have been in jeopardy without the services of the shipmen the next morning in maneuvering the ship nearer to the island.

By this time the centurion, and perhaps all the other men, had learned the wisdom of following Paul's advice. So the soldiers cut off the ropes and let the boat fall empty into the sea. Then while they waited, Paul admonished them to eat, for they had all fasted during those fourteen frightful days in the storm. But whether they fasted as a religious rite or simply because that in their fear and turmoil they had no desire for food, we do not know. Now that Paul's message had given them hope, and they had received encouragement from the sounding which showed them to be near land, it was for their phys-

ical well-being that they should eat. And when Paul had given thanks for the food and began to eat, all the two hundred and seventy-six men were encouraged to eat with him. Paul, as the Lord's representative, manifested his deep concern for both their physical and spiritual well-being and doubtless won converts from among them. By praying in their presence, he demonstrated his faith that they would all be saved.

### **The Shipwreck**

(Verses 38-44)

After all the men had eaten sufficiently, they again lightened the ship by dumping the remaining wheat into the sea. They had now sacrificed all the cargo of the ship and were no longer concerned for anything but the saving of their lives. This voyage had been a total loss materially, but it had been ordained of God to be a priceless experience to these men spiritually. They had been taught faith in Jehovah God and the true value of life. The psalmist wrote about those who go down in ships to do business in great waters and are made to see the works of the Lord in the deep. He raises the stormy winds and makes the waves to mount up to heaven to cause men to call on Him in their trouble. And He then calms the sea and saves them (Psalm 107:23-31).

When it was daylight, they saw that they were near land but had no idea of its location. They discovered the mouth of a creek which emptied into the sea and hoped it would prove to be a harbor into which they could maneuver the ship. So they took up the anchors, loosed the rudder bands so they could steer the ship, raised the sails to the wind, and started toward the shore.

## *Acts*

Having no knowledge of the land or of the condition of the ocean floor at this point, they ran the ship aground at a place where seemingly mud deposits had built up by the meeting of two seas or currents. The fore part of the ship stuck fast and the hinder part was soon broken to pieces by the violence of the waves which still raged.

When they were defeated in their efforts to bring the ship into the bay, which had appeared to be a natural harbor, the soldiers who were doubtless employed as guards of the prisoners suggested killing the prisoners lest they escape. This was probably due to the cruel Roman practice of holding guards responsible with their own lives for the prisoners they were set to guard. But the centurion Julius, into whose charge the prisoners had been committed, had become thoroughly convinced of Paul's integrity and of the fact of his divine protection, so he rejected the soldiers' counsel, for the sake of saving him. He commanded that those who were able to swim should be the first to leave the ship and swim to land. Then those who were unable to swim should attempt to reach the land on boards and broken pieces of the ship. In this way all the men escaped safely to land.

While the ship was still tossing in the storm, with no indication that they were near land, Paul had told the men of God's message to him that the ship would be lost but all lives would be saved. He had also told them that they would be cast upon an island, and now all had happened just as he had said.

God had revealed all this to His servant and then caused it to be minutely fulfilled to prove to these men that Paul's message of salvation was the truth of the God of creation. God alone is able to declare the end from the

beginning, and from ancient times the things which have not yet come to pass (Isaiah 46:10-13), that men may learn to believe and trust in His Word.

God spoke through the prophet Isaiah that He would restore the people of Israel to their land, through the great Persian king Cyrus, after they had spent seventy years in Babylonian captivity. He gave the name of this king and told what he should do, one hundred and fifty years before it came to pass exactly as the prophet had said (Isaiah 44:26-28; 45:1-4; Ezra 1:1-3). God foretold this so the people of Israel would know that their restoration was by His divine providence and power and not by any imagined power of idols (Isaiah 48:3-5). Surely we should learn to trust wholly in all of God's Word, since we have seen so much of prophecy minutely fulfilled.





# Chapter 28

## **PAUL'S JOURNEY TO ROME** *(Continued)*

### **The Landing on Melita**

(Verses 1-2)

None of the men of the wrecked ship, even though some of them were seasoned seamen, had the least idea of their location until they had landed on the island, since they had been tossed in the storm for fourteen days without any means of determining their direction. But when they landed, they learned that this was the island of Melita, which today is called Malta.

The island is about seventeen miles long and eight or nine miles wide and is located about sixty-two miles south of Sicily. It is said to have been colonized by the Phoenicians about the 10th century B.C., and its inhabitants at the time of the shipwreck were probably descended from these earlier settlers. It is thought that they were called barbarous people because their language was not understood by either the Greeks or the Latins.

## *Acts*

These people were kind to the victims of the shipwreck. The men who had escaped from the wrecked ship were all wet and cold. The time of the wreck was evidently in the month of October, and the weather was certainly stormy. But the people of the island received them kindly and built a bonfire to warm and dry them. This treatment must have been very welcome by all the men who had escaped from the wreck.

### **Paul Bitten by a Viper**

(Verses 3-6)

Paul, true to his nature, tried to be helpful by gathering fuel for the bonfire. He did not notice the viper hidden among the sticks that he laid on the fire. And as the heat and flames came up through the sticks, the viper came out from among them and bit Paul on the hand.

The natives of the island knew this viper to be very poisonous, the bite of which should have killed Paul in a very short time. They no doubt had already learned that he was one of the prisoners and, in their heathen superstition, decided that he must have been a murderer on whom his deity was taking vengeance. But Paul simply shook the serpent off into the fire and experienced no harm from its bite. He, in faith, had claimed the promise of Jesus that His disciples should take up snakes, and if they should drink any deadly poison, it should not hurt them (Mark 16:18).

When the people, after expecting for some time that he would fall down dead, saw that nothing happened, they decided that he must himself be a god. Paul had once before been taken for a god by heathen people who had seen the manifestation of the power of God in his life and

works (Acts 14:8-18). And the Lord manifested Himself to these heathen people through His servant at this time.

### **The Healing of Publius' Father**

(Verses 7-10)

Paul and his associates had been lodged courteously for three days in the quarters of Publius, the chief man or governor of the island, when he was given another opportunity to demonstrate the power of the Lord Jesus. He learned that the father of Publius was seriously ill with a fever and dysentery. He not only desired to reciprocate the favors he was receiving from his host but wanted to demonstrate the power of God to these people as a means of awakening their faith to receive the gospel of Jesus Christ. He perhaps asked to be admitted to the room of the sick man, where he laid hands on him and prayed for him, according to James' instruction for performing the ministry of healing (James 5:14-15).

The man was instantly healed. Then the people began bringing their sick ones from all over the island to Paul, and the Lord healed them through his prayers and faith. We may be assured that Paul took this opportunity to preach to them that the Lord who had healed them desired to save them from their sins and that many of them were converted to the faith of Jesus Christ and filled with the Holy Ghost.

Jesus, while on earth, healed all those who came to Him for healing. He healed them out of a heart of compassion for their physical suffering, but His main purpose was to lead them into faith for the healing of their eternal souls. By healing the man of palsy, who was carried to Him by four friends, He proved that He had power to forgive

## *Acts*

sins (Matthew 9:2-8). And the sermons and revivals of the apostles and ministers of the early church were generally preceded by a demonstration of God's power in healing (Acts 3:1-19; 5:12-16; 8:5-17; 9:32-42).

Healing is not the main issue of the gospel, but it is certainly a part of the apostolic message and one of the signs that the Lord ordained should follow the preaching of His gospel (Mark 16:15-20).

The beneficiaries of Paul's ministry on the island of Melita undoubtedly believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, as manifested by their show of appreciation. They highly honored Paul and his helpers and loaded them with gifts of necessary provisions when they departed from the island.

Tradition has recorded that the inhabitants of the island were converted to Christianity. And no doubt Paul and his friends gave thanks to God who had providentially guided the ship from the harbor of Fair Havens for an approximate four hundred and seventy-six miles across the Mediterranean to this island for the benefit of these people who needed to know of His gospel.

### **The Journey from Melita to Rome**

(Verses 11-16)

Julius with his prisoners and Paul's friends, and perhaps all of the two hundred and seventy-six men who escaped from the wrecked ship, had remained on the island of Melita for three months. They evidently reached the island some time in October, so they would have departed some time in January. They were able to leave by another ship of Alexandria, which also appears to have become stranded here for the winter, though faring better than the ship on which Paul had sailed. The winter was

not entirely over but the stormy season had passed sufficiently so that they could now sail with relative safety. They sailed from Melita to the historic and capital city of Syracuse, on the eastern coast of Sicily, which was about eighty miles north of Melita. They remained in this port for three days. Paul probably took advantage of those three days to plant the gospel seed in Syracuse, for he is regarded as the founder of Christianity in Sicily.

Sailing was still subject to weather conditions, but the crew of Paul's ship was able to sail by compass to Rhegium, which was a city on the toe of the Italian boot just opposite the northeast corner of Sicily. Perhaps the compass was necessary to sail the ship through the narrow strait, just six miles wide, between the island of Sicily and the toe of the Italian boot.

They tarried one day in Rhegium because of weather conditions. But the following day the south wind blew, and they were able to sail to Puteoli, about one hundred and eighty miles north of Rhegium, situated on the northern coast of the Bay of Naples. It was the leading port of Italy and perhaps the nearest port to Rome and the destination of the ship, for Paul and his company went the rest of the way to Rome overland.

In Puteoli they found a congregation of Christians who desired them to remain with them for seven days. Julius was evidently favorable to their request, and Paul was able to minister to the saints there for seven days, after which they went on their way to Rome.

By this time, the saints in Rome had heard that, at last, Paul was on his way from Puteoli and nearing Rome, so a number of the brethren went to meet him on the way. One group went as far as Appii Forum, a village on the

famous Appian Way, which was forty-three miles from Rome. Another group met him at Three Taverns, which was about thirty-three miles from Rome. The loving concern of these brethren who traveled such distances to meet him was heartwarming and encouraging to Paul after his long and turbulent voyage.

Paul had never been to Rome before this time, but he had many friends there. These friends informed the saints whom he had not met about him and the great work he had done. He had written to them his important Epistle of Romans from Corinth in Greece on the occasion of his third missionary journey. At the time he had written that letter, Aquila and Priscilla were again in Rome (Romans 16:3-5) and may still have been in Rome at this time. In his Epistle to the Romans he had expressed his sincere desire and intention to visit them (Romans 1:8-15), and now that desire and intention was being fulfilled.

### **Paul's Ministry in Rome**

(Verses 16-31)

When the centurion Julius finally arrived in Rome with his prisoners and Paul's friends, he delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard in Rome. This was the emperor's guard. He had at last completed his assignment which had involved so many difficulties and dangers. And he probably relinquished his charge with a feeling of relief, except perhaps for a feeling of reluctance to leave the association of the godly Paul.

Perhaps it was on Julius' recommendation that the captain of the guard gave Paul the unusual liberty of dwelling by himself in his own hired (rented) house, with only a single soldier to guard him. And those soldiers

who, in turn, were chained to Paul, enjoyed the rare privilege of association with a man who was a personal representative of the Lord Jesus Christ. The other prisoners were kept in a camp near the city, according to the history and customs of that time.

Paul lost little time in beginning his ministry in Rome. The three days which elapsed before he called the chief men of the Jews to him were barely enough time to become settled in his new abode and, perhaps, for a brief relaxation from his strenuous journey.

When the Jews came to him, he sought to erase from their minds any prejudiced or preconceived ideas they might have formed against him from news received of his trouble with the Jews in Jerusalem. They, of course, knew that he was now a prisoner in Rome. He told them that the Romans would have released him, but because the Jews demanded a death sentence against him, he was compelled to appeal to Caesar. They had clamored for him to be sent back to Jerusalem, where they intended to take the law into their own hands and kill him.

Paul wanted the Jews in Rome to know that he harbored no ill-will toward the people of his own nation. He hoped to have friendly relations with the Jews in Rome, so that he might preach the gospel of Jesus to them. He followed the same pattern in his ministry here that he had followed in every place he had gone, that of taking his message of salvation first to his own people, the Jews.

The Jews of Rome assured him that they had had no letters or complaints against him from Jerusalem and that they desired to hear his doctrine of Jesus, for all they knew of it was that it was spoken against in every place. It was



## *Acts*

to their credit that they had not yet become prejudiced against the message of Jesus. So Paul appointed a certain day, and many came to his lodging to hear him expound the gospel of Jesus Christ, showing by the law of Moses and the prophets that Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures.

As the Jews had done elsewhere, some believed, and some rejected his message. He showed to the unbelieving that the Scripture had foretold of their unbelief (Isaiah 6:9-10). Jesus had often reminded unbelieving Jews that they fulfilled this prophetic passage (Matthew 13:14-15; John 12:37-40). And Paul had before referred to the prophecy of their unbelief (Acts 13:40-41; Romans 11:7-10). When he told them that God was sending His message of salvation to the Gentiles, who would hear and receive it, they departed from him, reasoning among themselves. A remnant of the Jews in Rome were converted to Jesus but, as elsewhere, the majority of them refused to believe in Him.

Paul lived in his own rented house, under house arrest, for two years and had a rich and full ministry among both Jews and Gentiles. He was not permitted to go out to seek an audience, but many who were hungry for truth came to him to hear his message of life and peace in Jesus. By the divine providence and power of God, he was permitted perfect freedom to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Neither the emperor nor any of the Roman officers tried to hinder him in any way.

When he was not preaching to those who came to him, he spent much time writing to the various churches he had left in Asia Minor and in Macedonia. During those two years he wrote the epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. And we, after

studying of his experiences during the two years imprisonment in Caesarea, his tempestuous voyage to Rome, and his two years imprisonment there, can better understand his words to the saints of Philippi, that all the things which had happened to him had fallen out unto the furtherance of the gospel (Philippians 1:12). Through his ministry in Rome, his testimony had reached into the very palace of the emperor, and his faithfulness in his bonds of affliction had been an example to encourage others to boldly proclaim the gospel of Jesus in the face of persecutions (Philippians 1:13-18).

It has been inferred from certain passages in the epistles which Paul wrote from Rome, and from his pastoral epistles to Timothy and Titus, that he was set at liberty at the end of the two years and traveled again in missionary work. But he was finally apprehended a second time and executed in Rome sometime between 65 and 68 A.D. He seems to have referred in his letter to the Philippians to a time when he was in doubt whether he would be executed immediately or be given his liberty. He testified that he desired to depart and be with the Lord but concluded that he would be spared for the furtherance of their faith and expected to be able to visit them again (Philippians 1:21-27). And he wrote to Philemon to prepare him a lodging, for he expected to be delivered (from prison) through the prayers of the saints (Philemon 22). He is thought to have written the epistles of I Timothy and Titus during his period of freedom between the two imprisonments in Rome. And it appears obvious, from the last chapter of II Timothy, that he wrote it during the second imprisonment and just before his execution (II Timothy 4:6-21).

## *Acts*

He faithfully finished his ministry on earth, but the influence of the ministry of this great man of faith will live on to the end of the church age. Thousands of people for nearly two thousand years have been greatly influenced and blessed by his teaching of the great doctrines of Jesus Christ and his practical admonitions to holiness and purity of life. Perhaps no other man in history has had so much influence on Christian doctrine and living.

# Questions

## Chapter 1

1. Who was the author of the Book of Acts?
2. Of what was the Book of Acts a continuation?
3. To whom was the Book of Acts written? When was it written?
4. What is the theme of the Book of Acts? What is its key word?
5. What are the natural divisions of the Book of Acts?
6. What is implied in verse 1?
7. What is referred to by “the former treatise” in verse 1?
8. What proof of Christ’s resurrection is given in verse 3?
9. What is meant by the word “passion” in verse 3?
10. How long was Jesus on earth after His resurrection?
11. What is meant by “the promise of the Father” in verse 4?
12. What was the disciples’ misunderstanding of Jesus’ instruction to wait for the promise of the Father?
13. What did Jesus promise the disciples?

*Acts*

14. What did the angels promise after the ascension of Jesus?
15. From what mountain did Jesus ascend?
16. How far from Jerusalem was the point from which He ascended?
17. What was said concerning the number of disciples who waited in the upper room in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father?
18. What important business did the disciples transact while they waited in Jerusalem?

**Chapter 2**

1. What was the Feast of Pentecost?
2. Why was the Holy Ghost first given on the Day of Pentecost?
3. What is the Holy Ghost?
4. Describe the manner in which the Holy Ghost was poured out on the disciples.
5. Why were there people from many nations in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost?
6. By what demonstration were they confounded?
7. How did Peter explain the demonstration to them?
8. What time of the day was the third hour?
9. What was the theme of Peter's first sermon?
10. What prophecies did he interpret? What were his interpretations of these prophecies?
11. What was the effect of Peter's sermon?
12. What Scripture clearly interprets the meaning of Acts 2:38?
13. What does the Lord require of men for salvation?
14. How did Luke describe the first Pentecostal church?
15. What motivated the disciples to sell their possessions

and put the money into a common treasury to be shared by all?

### **Chapter 3**

1. What miracle is recorded in chapter three?
2. What routine practice were Peter and John observing when this opportunity for service was presented to them?
3. Describe the healing of the lame man.
4. What effect did this miracle have upon the people?
5. How is the miracle of divine healing a symbol of the spiritual healing of the soul?
6. How was the healing of the lame man the occasion for Peter's second sermon? What was the theme of this second sermon?
7. With what sin did he indict the Jews, and what hope did he hold out to them?

### **Chapter 4**

1. What persecution resulted from the healing of the lame man?
2. Why were the members of the Sanhedrin grieved because the apostles preached the resurrection of Jesus?
3. What question of the council was the occasion for Peter's third sermon?
4. What was the theme of Peter's sermon to the members of the council?
5. What principal witness did the apostles have for their defense before the council?
6. By what text did Peter make the gospel of Jesus mandatory?

## *Acts*

7. Why did the members of the council consider Peter and John to be unlearned and ignorant men? For what did they marvel?
8. Why did they not keep them in prison?
9. How did they attempt to intimidate the apostles?
10. What was the response of Peter and John to their demand?
11. What was the reaction of the company of disciples when Peter and John reported the proceedings and the outcome of their trial?
12. What fulfillment of prophecy did they recognize in their persecution?
13. What was the nature of the prayer of the company of disciples?
14. What was God's answer to their prayer?
15. What was said of Barnabas in the conclusion of this chapter?

### **Chapter 5**

1. What was the nature of the sin of Ananias and Sapphira?
2. What was the root of their sin?
3. Were they killed because they did not bring all the price of their land to the apostles?
4. Why did God judge them so severely for their sin?
5. What upsurge of the power of the Holy Ghost did the apostles experience after the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira?
6. Was there any healing virtue in Peter's shadow?
7. What was the council's second persecution against the apostles?
8. What miracle of the Lord thwarted their purpose?

9. What was the frustration and disadvantage of the council in their second trial of the apostles?
10. What was Peter's answer to the reprimand of the high priest?
11. What advice did Gamaliel give to the council? Why did they agree to follow his advice?
12. What was their second attempt to try to stop the apostles from preaching in the name of Jesus?
13. What was the apostles' attitude toward their persecution?

### **Chapter 6**

1. What situation arose which required the appointment of deacons?
2. Who were the Grecians referred to in verse 1?
3. Who were the Hebrews against whom the Grecians made a complaint?
4. Why was more organization needed in the early church at this time?
5. How did the apostles provide for this need?
6. What was required of those who should be elected to the office of deacon?
7. How did God put His blessing on this move of the church?
8. To what greater ministry was deacon Stephen led by the Spirit of God?
9. What persecution resulted from Stephen's zealous ministry?
10. What false accusations were made against him?
11. How did the Lord witness for him?



### **Chapter 7**

1. What was Stephen's main purpose for his speech of defense before the council?
2. What was the subject of his discourse?
3. What three things did he prove in his resume of Israel's history?
4. What did Stephen prove by showing the Jews that their forefathers had rebelled against God and His servants in all their generations?
5. What was the effect of Stephen's words on his enemies?
6. How did God sustain Stephen in his persecution?
7. What was the significance of his vision of Jesus standing on the right hand of God?
8. What part did Saul of Tarsus have in the stoning of Stephen?
9. How did Stephen manifest the Spirit of Christ in his last prayer?
10. What was the success and the extent of Stephen's short ministry?

### **Chapter 8**

1. What caused the Christians to be scattered from Jerusalem?
2. Why did not the apostles leave Jerusalem?
3. How did Saul's campaign of persecution become the means of spreading the gospel of Jesus?
4. What were the results of deacon Philip's preaching in Samaria?
5. Who was Simon? Was he really converted?
6. Why did the apostles send Peter and John to Samaria?

7. What ministry did they perform in Samaria?
8. Why did God send Philip from Samaria to the desert?
9. At what strategic time and place did he meet the Ethiopian eunuch?
10. What is revealed of the position and the religion of the Ethiopian?
11. How is personal evangelism shown to be an important part of the Lord's work?
12. How does this incident show the importance of prompt obedience to God's call?
13. How did the Lord perfectly arrange and time this meeting of Philip with the Ethiopian?
14. What was the result of Philip's ministry to the Ethiopian?
15. What happened to Philip after the Ethiopian was baptized?

### **Chapter 9**

1. By what force was Saul driven in his fanatic persecution of the Christians?
2. Was he sincere in his fight against Christianity?
3. Why did he go to Damascus? Where was this city located?
4. How was he foiled by the Lord in his purpose?
5. How was Saul made to realize that he did not know the Lord?
6. How did the Lord identify Himself to him?
7. How did the Lord show him he had been fighting against the conviction of his own heart?
8. What was Saul made to see in his physical blindness?
9. Where did the Lord instruct him to go?
10. Whom did the Lord send to pray for him and baptize him?

*Acts*

11. What comfort must he have received in the greeting of Ananias?
12. What was the immediate manifestation of Saul's transformation?
13. Why was it necessary for him to escape from Damascus? How did he escape?
14. Was Saul's persecution the retribution of God?
15. Where did Saul first go from Damascus?
16. What Scripture, of Paul's personal testimony, fills in the story between verses 25 and 26?
17. When and by what route did he afterward come to Jerusalem?
18. How long did he remain in Jerusalem at this time? Why did he leave?
19. Where did he go from Jerusalem? What resulted from his leaving?
20. What two miracles performed by Peter are recorded in verses 32-41?
21. Describe each of these miracles. Tell where each took place.
22. Why do you think God was pleased to raise Dorcas from the dead?

**Chapter 10**

1. Who was Cornelius? What was said of his character and faith?
2. What was God's response to Cornelius' prayers and alms?
3. What was the angel's instruction to Cornelius?
4. Why did not the angel give him the gospel message?
5. What was Cornelius' prompt obedience to the angel's message?

6. Where was Peter at this time? How did God prepare him to return to Caesarea with the messengers from Cornelius?
7. Who accompanied Peter to Caesarea?
8. What preparations had Cornelius made to receive Peter?
9. Why did he attempt to worship Peter?
10. What did Peter preach to the household of Cornelius?
11. In what attitude did these Gentiles receive Peter's gospel message?
12. Why did God give them the Holy Ghost before they were baptized?
13. How did Peter and the other Jews who accompanied him know that the Gentiles had received the Holy Ghost?
14. Why did Peter then command them to be baptized?

### **Chapter 11**

1. How did the Christians in Jerusalem react to the news that Peter had gone into a Gentile home?
2. What was the basis of the Jews' belief that it was wrong to associate with Gentiles?
3. How did Peter defend his going to the home of Cornelius in Caesarea?
4. In what other places was the gospel preached by those who were scattered from Jerusalem?
5. To whom was the gospel of Jesus preached in Antioch? Where was Antioch located?
6. Why was Barnabas sent to Antioch?
7. Whom did he persuade to help in the work in Antioch?
8. By what name were the converts in Antioch called?

*Acts*

9. How long did Barnabas and Saul minister together in Antioch at this time?
10. For what purpose did they make a trip to Jerusalem?

### **Chapter 12**

1. Who was the Herod referred to in verse one?
2. Which one of the apostles named James did he kill?
3. Why did he imprison Peter?
4. What was meant by the days of unleavened bread?
5. What was meant by the word “Easter” in this passage?
6. What was a quaternion of soldiers?
7. Describe the miracle of Peter’s deliverance from prison.
8. What did Peter do after he was delivered from prison?
9. In whose house did the Christians meet to pray for Peter?
10. Where did Herod go after Peter’s escape?
11. With whom did he become reconciled?
12. At what climax of his glory did God’s judgment fall on him?
13. By what judgment did God strike him down?
14. What was said of Barnabas and Saul at the conclusion of this chapter?

#### **A Brief Political History of Palestine from 40 B.C. to 70 A.D.**

Herod the Great reigned over all Palestine from 40 B.C. to 4 B.C. His son Herod Antipas reigned over Galilee and Peraea from 4 B.C. to 41 A.D. His son Philip reigned over Trachonitis ( East of Galilee) from 4 B.C. to 41 A.D. Lysanias (another son of Herod the Great) reigned over Abilene (North of Galilee) from 4 B.C. to 41 A.D. Archelaus (another son of Herod the Great) reigned over Judea and Samaria

from 4 B.C. to 6 A.D. He was then deposed and a Roman governor was placed over Judea and Samaria. Herod Agrippa I (who killed James and imprisoned Peter) was the son of Aristobulus, who was also a son of Herod the Great. Herod Agrippa I reigned over all Palestine, as king, from 41 to 44 A.D. His son Herod Agrippa II (of Acts 26) reigned over Trachonitis and Abilene, as king, from 44 to 70 A.D. During his reign, Roman governors again reigned over Judea and Samaria.

### **Chapter 13**

1. How were Paul and Barnabas commissioned and ordained for their first missionary journey?
2. Who accompanied them?
3. Trace their journey on the map and tell what happened at each stop.
4. Who was Bar-jesus? For what was he struck blind?
5. Who was Sergius Paulus? How was he converted to the faith of Jesus?
6. From what place did John Mark return to Jerusalem?
7. Where was Antioch of Pisidia located? What opportunity did Paul have to preach the gospel of Jesus in this city?
8. What was the theme of Paul's message in the synagogue in Antioch?
9. What was the result of the missionaries' ministry in Antioch of Pisidia?
10. Why did Paul and Barnabas leave Antioch? Where did they go?

### **Chapter 14**

1. Where was Iconium located?
2. What was the success of the ministry of Paul and Barnabas in Iconium?
3. By whom were they persecuted in Iconium?

## *Acts*

4. Why did they leave Iconium? Where did they go from Iconium?
5. Where was Lystra located?
6. What miracle did Paul perform in Lystra?
7. What effect did this miracle have on the heathen of Lystra?
8. Why did they call Barnabas “Jupiter” and Paul “Mercurius”?
9. How did this reveal the team relationship of Paul and Barnabas?
10. By whom were Paul and Barnabas persecuted in Lystra?
11. After what experience did they leave Lystra?
12. Where did they go from Lystra?
13. Where was Derbe located?
14. What was recorded of their ministry in Derbe?
15. Why did they retrace their journey from Derbe?
16. What did they do as they returned to each place where they had left congregations of converts?
17. Trace on the map their return trip to Antioch in Syria.
18. Describe their homecoming in Antioch of Syria.
19. Over what period of time did this first missionary journey extend?

### **Chapter 15**

1. What was the purpose of the council which was held in Jerusalem?
2. What circumstance necessitated this council?
3. Who were the main speakers in the council?
4. What was Peter’s argument?
5. What were the testimonies of Paul and Barnabas?
6. Who presided over the council? What was his decision on the question discussed?

7. Was the church agreeable to his decision?
8. How and by whom did they send the decree of the decision to the church in Antioch in Syria?
9. How did the council in Jerusalem commend Paul and Barnabas?
10. Of the two ministers sent from Jerusalem with Paul and Barnabas, who chose to remain in Antioch? How did this choice effect his future?
11. What contention arose over the plan for a second missionary journey?
12. How was this disagreement settled?
13. Where did Barnabas and John Mark go?
14. Who accompanied Paul? By what route did they go?

### **Chapter 16**

1. Who was Timothy? Where did he join Paul's missionary party?
2. What was said of Timothy's reputation? What was said of his background in II Timothy 1:5?
3. What difficulty did Paul need to overcome before taking Timothy along on his missionary travels?
4. What were the decrees referred to in verse 4?
5. Where were the regions of Phrygia and Galatia which Paul and his helpers evangelized?
6. Where was he restrained from going by the Spirit of the Lord?
7. Where did Paul receive the Macedonian call?
8. What city in Macedonia did he first evangelize? Who was his first convert in this place?
9. What adversities did Paul and his helpers encounter in Philippi?
10. What was the success of his ministry there?



*Acts*

11. Under what circumstances did Paul and his party leave Philippi?

**Chapter 17**

1. Where was Thessalonica located?
2. Where in Thessalonica did Paul preach? What did he preach?
3. What opposition did the missionaries encounter in Thessalonica?
4. Why did the brethren send Paul and Silas out of Thessalonica by night?
5. Where did Paul and Silas preach in Berea? Where was Berea located?
6. Why were the people said to be more noble than those of Thessalonica?
7. Who stirred up persecution against the missionaries in Berea?
8. Where did Paul go from Berea?
9. What condition did Paul find in Athens? Where was Athens located?
10. To whom did he minister in Athens?
11. How was Paul given the opportunity to speak before Athens' famous court of Areopagus? What was the nature of this court?
12. Why did Paul choose to speak on the subject of the "Unknown God" before the Areopagus on Mars' Hill?
13. How did he preach Jesus from this subject?
14. What was the success of his ministry in Athens?

**Chapter 18**

1. Where did Paul go from Athens? Where was Corinth located?

2. To what country did the cities of Athens and Corinth belong?
3. Under what circumstances did Paul become associated with Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth?
4. To whom did he preach in Corinth?
5. What encouragement did Paul receive by being rejoined by Silas and Timothy in Corinth?
6. What opposition did he encounter in Corinth?
7. What door was opened to him when the door of the synagogue was closed to him?
8. How long did he minister in Corinth at this time?
9. What attitude did Gallio the governor manifest when the Jews accused Paul to him?
10. With whom did Paul leave Corinth?
11. Why did he cut his hair before sailing from Cenchrea?
12. Where did Paul leave Priscilla and Aquila?
13. Why did he not remain in Ephesus longer at this time?
14. Trace Paul's travels from Ephesus back to Antioch in Syria.
15. From what place did Paul begin his third missionary journey?
16. What places did he visit before returning to Ephesus?
17. What ministry did Priscilla and Aquila perform in Ephesus before Paul's return?
18. Where did Apollos go from Ephesus?
19. With what ability did he minister in Corinth?

### **Chapter 19**

1. To whom did Paul begin his ministry in Ephesus?

*Acts*

2. What was the doctrinal status of these disciples of John the Baptist?
3. What was their response to Paul's message of the gospel of Jesus?
4. How long did Paul minister in the synagogue of the Jews?
5. What door was opened to him when he was forced to leave the synagogue because of persecution?
6. How long did he preach in the school of Tyrannus?
7. Why did the people seek Paul's handkerchiefs and aprons to put upon the sick and diseased?
8. How were the seven sons of Sceva defeated in their attempt to use the name of Jesus?
9. What inroads did Paul's ministry make on the false magic arts and sorceries of Ephesus?
10. What uproar did the silversmiths create because of the inroads of Paul's ministry against idolatry?
11. How did the townclerk dispel the mob?

**Chapter 20**

1. Where did Paul go when he left Ephesus after the uproar over the worship of the goddess Diana?
2. How much was implied in Luke's brief account of Paul's ministry in Macedonia on this occasion?
3. Where did he go from Macedonia?
4. How may we discern something of the nature of Paul's ministry to the church in Corinth on this occasion?
5. How long did he remain in Corinth at this time?
6. Why was it necessary for him to leave Corinth by a different route than that which he had planned? By what route did he return?

7. How do we know that Luke was with Paul in Philippi?
8. Where did Paul and Luke rejoin the other members of their party?
9. Describe the all-night meeting in Troas on the last night of the missionaries' stay there.
10. Why do you think Paul desired to walk the nineteen miles from Troas to Assos while his companions went by ship?
11. Why did Paul purposely bypass Ephesus and stop in Miletus?
12. With what responsibility did Paul charge the elders of the church of Ephesus? By what example did he impress their responsibility?
13. Describe the farewell prayer meeting in Miletus.
14. For what did the elders sorrow most?

### **Chapter 21**

1. Trace the missionaries' voyage from Miletus to Caesarea.
2. How long did they remain in Tyre? What did the Spirit of the Lord witness to Paul through the disciples of Tyre?
3. Why did these disciples advise Paul not to go to Jerusalem?
4. In whose home were Paul and his friends entertained in Caesarea?
5. Through whom did the Spirit of the Lord again witness that Paul would be bound in Jerusalem?
6. Why did Paul determine to go to Jerusalem in spite of this witness of the Spirit which he had known for some time (Acts 20:22-24)?
7. What disciple went from Caesarea to provide lodging for the missionaries in Jerusalem?

## *Acts*

8. How was Paul received by James and the brethren in Jerusalem?
9. What did they advise him to do in an attempt to avoid violence by the Jews who were incensed against him?
10. What was the nature of the purification ceremonies which Paul observed with the four men?
11. By what rumor was the hostility of the Jews ignited into a wild riot?
12. Why did the Jews drag Paul out to the Court of the Gentiles before attempting to beat him to death?
13. How did this make possible the deliverance of Paul by the Roman soldiers?
14. Why was the captain of the Roman guard surprised when Paul spoke to him in Greek?
15. Why did Paul ask permission to speak to the Jews from the top of the stairway which led into the castle of the Roman garrison?

### **Chapter 22**

1. How did Paul gain the rapt attention of the Jews as he spoke to them from the stairway?
2. What was Paul's main concern in speaking to them at this time?
3. Why did he speak to them of his conversion to Jesus on the Damascus road?
4. At what point was his speech cut short by the angry shouts of the Jews?
5. What was the basis for the Jews' hatred and prejudice against Gentiles?
6. How did the Roman captain attempt to obtain a confession of crime from Paul?

7. From what did Paul's Roman citizenship protect him at this time?
8. What was the captain's next move to try to learn of the charges against Paul?

### **Chapter 23**

1. As Paul spoke to the council of the Jews, of what did he hope to convince them?
2. How did the high priest react to his first statement?
3. By what was Paul's rebuke of the high priest motivated?
4. How did Paul show his respect for the office of high priest but not for the person of Ananias?
5. Why did Paul inject into this situation the doctrinal difference between the Pharisees and Sadducees on the question of the resurrection?
6. What was the result of this strategy?
7. How did the Lord comfort and reassure Paul following his appearance before the council?
8. What plot did the Jews lay to get Paul out from the safety of the Roman castle in order to assassinate him?
9. How did the Lord save him from this conspiracy?
10. What measures did the chief captain take by which to spirit him safely out of Jerusalem? To whom did he send Paul?

### **Chapter 24**

1. By whom were the Jews' charges made against Paul in his trial before the governor Felix? What charges did he make?
2. Why were the disciples of Jesus spoken of as the sect of the Nazarenes?

## *Acts*

3. What did Paul refute of the charges of the Jews? What did he confess?
4. Why did Felix defer to pass judgment in this trial?
5. How was he shown to have been favorably impressed with Paul?
6. What opportunity had Felix to become more familiar with the Jews' religion?
7. Why did he come with his wife to Paul for a private interview?
8. To what extent was he moved as Paul preached to him of Jesus?
9. What was the result of his deferring to make a decision for Christ?
10. Why did he not release Paul before his term as governor expired?

### **Chapter 25**

1. Who succeeded Felix as governor of the Jews?
2. Why did he go to Jerusalem only three days after becoming governor in Caesarea?
3. Why did the Jews take advantage of this visit to renew their efforts to have Paul returned to Jerusalem?
4. What did Festus require of them?
5. What was the result of Paul's trial before Festus?
6. Why did Paul appeal to Caesar? What right had he to do so?
7. Who were King Agrippa and Bernice, introduced in verse 13?
8. For what purpose did Festus arrange a hearing for Paul before Agrippa?

### **Chapter 26**

1. What were the high points of Paul's message before Agrippa?
2. What was shown to be his greatest concern as he was given the opportunity to appear before these rulers?
3. Why did he again relate the story of his conversion to the faith of Jesus?
4. What was the main theme of his testimony before Agrippa?
5. How did Paul's zealous and anointed testimony affect Festus?
6. What was Agrippa's response to Paul's impassioned plea to accept Jesus?
7. What was the final decision of Festus and Agrippa concerning Paul?

### **Chapter 27**

1. Who was shown to have sailed with Paul when he with other prisoners was committed to the charge of the centurion Julius and sent to Rome?
2. What favor was Paul shown by Julius?
3. To what ship did Julius transfer his prisoners and Paul's friends at Myra?
4. How did the stormy weather affect their voyage?
5. Where did they dock on the island of Crete?
6. Why did not the centurion heed Paul's warning not to sail from Fair Havens?
7. What was the result of their sailing from Fair Havens?
8. How long was the ship driven in the storm on the Mediterranean?
9. What was Paul's next message to the men on the ship?



10. What was their attitude toward this second message?
11. How was Paul's message from the Lord minutely fulfilled?

### **Chapter 28**

1. On what island did the men of the wrecked ship land? What is its location?
2. How did the natives of the island receive the ship-wrecked men?
3. By what miracle were the natives made to respect Paul?
4. What ministry did Paul perform on the island of Melita?
5. How long were the men stranded on this island? By what ship did they leave?
6. How did the natives honor Paul and his friends when they departed?
7. How long did they remain in the port of Syracuse on the island of Sicily?
8. Why did they remain one day in Rhegium on the mainland of Italy?
9. At what port did Julius and his company leave the ship?
10. By what route did they travel overland to Rome?
11. How did the Christians of Rome welcome Paul?
12. To whom did Julius commit Paul and the other prisoners?
13. What special privilege was shown to Paul?
14. How did Paul begin his ministry in Rome?
15. How long did he as a prisoner minister to all who came to his own hired house?
16. What epistles did he write during his two years imprisonment in Rome?