



# ACTS:

I Will Build  
My Church

A Global Association of Theological Studies Publication

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GATS Edition  
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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Acts : I will build my church. -- GATS edition.

pages cm

"A Global Association of Theological Studies Publication."

ISBN 978-0-7577-4604-8

1. Bible. Acts--Criticism, interpretation, etc. 2. Bible. Acts--Study and teaching. I. Global Association of Theological Studies.

BS2625.52.A24 2015

226.6'077--dc23

2015020467



Global Missions  
gratefully acknowledges

**Life Church**

Stan Gleason, pastor  
Kansas City, Missouri

and its \$5000 contribution to sponsor  
the production and translation of

**ACTS:**

*I Will Build  
My Church*



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## Lesson 1

# Acts 1:1-8

### Introduction

This course is an exegetical study of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. To understand the Book of Acts, we have to start *before* the Book of Acts with a conversation Jesus had with His disciples:

“When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock *I will build my church* [emphasis added]; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ. From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day” (Matthew 16:13-21).

This passage is important to understanding the Book of Acts.

- This is the first time the New Testament uses *church*.
- The church is built on the *revelation* of who Jesus is.
  - Peter’s statement is a strong declaration of the oneness of God. Peter said, “You are the anointed body that God is housed in.”
  - Regardless of how large a religious entity may be, unless it is built upon the revelation of who Jesus is, it is not a church but just a religion. As defined by the Bible, Jesus builds His church on the revelation that He is the Son of God.
  - Neither the gates of Hell nor anything else can prevail against the church because it is built on the rock of revelation.
- That revelation cannot be understood—or obeyed—without the *death, burial, and resurrection* of Jesus Christ.
  - Jesus said, “Don’t tell anyone who I am until after my death, burial, and resurrection.” Jesus then began to teach His disciples that He must go unto Jerusalem; suffer many things of the elders, chief priests, and scribes; be killed; and then raised again the third day. The revelation of who Jesus is is powerless without His **death, burial, and resurrection**.
- The words *bind* and *loose* are perfect passive participles in the Greek, indicating things that have *already* been bound or loosed.
  - The church can loose what God has released, such as healing and revival, and can bind what God has bound, such as evil spirits.
- We must build the church according to God’s *blueprint* if we want His *blessing*, according to His *pattern* if we want His *power*.
- Ultimately, God does the building: “*I will build my church.*”
- Since Jesus gave Peter the *keys* of the kingdom of Heaven, we need to obey what Peter said and do what he did in the Book of Acts.
  - All of the disciples were given the power to loose and bind things; only Peter was given the keys to the Kingdom. We need to be attentive to what Peter said and did in the Book of Acts.

## Jesus Bought the Church

*The church is the only thing God ever had to buy.* God created everything else—sun, moon, and stars, humanity, plants, and animals—but the church cost Him dearly. Acts 20:28 states, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” The privilege we have to be part of the church of the living God is beyond measure.



If a contractor builds a house for someone, he sticks to the blueprint, which is the will of the purchaser. If we want to build a church, we need to stick to the blueprint, the Bible, which is the will of the purchaser, God. *The Book of Acts is the blueprint for the first-century church.*

Bible translators called this book *The Acts of the Apostles*, but really, it is “The Acts of the *Holy Spirit* through the Apostles.” Only the Holy Ghost could create an institution that has survived the persecution the church has endured. Only the Holy Ghost could empower an institution that could change lives of men and women through the power of the gospel.

### **Luke, the Author**

The author of the Book of Acts is Luke, a physician. His Gospel talks about God *with* men—Emmanuel; Acts talks about God being *in* men—the Holy Ghost.

Luke began his Gospel stating:

“Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed” (Luke 1:1-4).

The name Theophilus means “lover of God,” and Luke was instructing him in the basics of the faith. Luke was an eyewitness to these things, having traveled with the apostle Paul. (Notice that Luke’s narrative changes from “they” to “we” in Acts.)

### **Acts 1:1-3**

Luke began his history of the early church stating:

“The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up,

after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: to whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:1-3).

Jesus' ministry was all about *doing* and *teaching*. Jesus did not work miracles just for miracles' sake. He wasn't a party magician showing off. Instead, He used them to teach doctrine. For example, He healed the blind man and taught, "I am the light of the world." He fed five thousand and taught, "I am the bread of life." He raised Lazarus from the dead and taught, "I am the resurrection and life." He also did not teach just for teaching's sake, but "he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matthew 7:29).

Paul wrote to Timothy, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine [teaching]; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (I Timothy 4:16). Likewise, James stated, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22).

Jesus said, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). You must have both Spirit and truth. Too much teaching and not enough Spirit is deadly. Paul stated, "Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (II Corinthians 3:6).

What are the "commandments" that Jesus gave to the apostles just before He was "taken up" (Acts 1:2)?

"And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:44-49).

Jesus said, “I will be crucified, be buried, and then rise again, and because of this I want you to go out and preach repentance, baptism (‘remission of sins’) in My name, and the baptism of the Holy Ghost (‘the promise of my Father’).” The very last thing Jesus did on earth with His disciples was to emphasize how to obey the gospel—and Peter preached this very same message in Acts 2:38.

Jesus “shewed himself alive” for forty days after His resurrection, and gave His disciples “many infallible proofs” (Acts 1:3). The official position of the Jews was that the disciples had merely stolen Jesus’ body. So if Jesus were still dead, the gospel had no power. All of Jerusalem knew that Jesus had been crucified—few knew that He had risen from the dead.

The last the world saw of Jesus was on Mount Calvary—crucified. The last the disciples saw of Jesus was on the Mount of Olives—resurrected.

## **Acts 1:4-5**

*By their words, their walk, and their works, the first-century church proved that Jesus was alive. And doing so, they turned the first century around. Luke recorded:*

“And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence” (Acts 1:4-5).

The Holy Ghost is the resurrection power of God in every believer. Paul stated, “But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Romans 8:11). The Holy Ghost dwelling within the believers will quicken them and give them power to live above sin and power to overcome the devil.

## **Acts 1:6-8**

“When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or

the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:6-8).

The Jews always had a wrong concept of the kingdom of God, confining it to a nationalistic, materialistic, political, and physical sense. Because Jesus did not come to establish that type of earthly kingdom, the crowd that cried, "Hosanna!" eventually cried, "Crucify Him!" This mentality affected even the disciples—that's why they argued over which one of them would be greater—but it was God's kingdom.

### **Time and Power**

In response to the disciples' question about restoring the Jewish kingdom, Jesus stated, "It is not for you to know the times [*chronos*] or the seasons [*kairos*], which the Father hath put in his own power [*exousia*]. But ye shall receive power [*dynamis*]" (Acts 1:7-8a).

God has two words for *time*:

- *Chronos* – time governed by the clock
- *Kairos* – special moments of visitation by God

"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time [*kairos*], because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:15-16).

"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season [*kairos*] we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9).

When the disciples asked when Jesus was going to "restore the kingdom" (send revival), He told them that it was not for them to distinguish between the "times" (*chronos*) and the "seasons" (*kairos*), because only God controls times of supernatural visitation.

God has two words for *power*:

- In Greek, *exousia* is authority, or "restraining" power
- In Greek, *dunamis* is ability, or "doing" power

Consider the following verses of Scripture:

“And with great power [*dunamis*] gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:33).

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power [*dunamis*] of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16).

“For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power [*dunamis*]” (I Corinthians 4:20).

“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power [*dunamis*] may be of God, and not of us” (II Corinthians 4:7).

Only God has power (*exousia* = authority) over the results of our prayer, our worship, our work, and our lives. Nevertheless, He has given us power (*dunamis* = ability) to be witnesses.

*The key to revival is for the church to exercise its ability until God exercises His authority.*

Luke 24:47 said this would happen “beginning at Jerusalem.”

Acts 1:8 says, “Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

## **Two Apostles and Two Cities**

Acts centers around two apostles and two cities:

- Acts 1-12 is about Peter, the apostle to the Jews, and Jerusalem
- Acts 13-28 is about Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, and Antioch

Peter’s ministry reached Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria.

Paul’s ministry reached the uttermost part of the earth—even to Rome. Rome, center of the world empire that crucified the Nazarene and stamped its seal on His tomb to prevent the Resurrection, hadn’t heard the end of Jesus.

If we want to know what Jesus intended when He talked about preaching or miracles or repentance or baptism or receiving the Holy Spirit to look like, we must turn to the Book of Acts; it is the blueprint for the church. If we want to know how the disciples interpreted the Great Commission, we must turn to the Book of Acts; it is the blueprint for the church.

**“Ye shall be witnesses” (Acts 1:8) = *Martys* (Martyr).**

A martyr is one who literally “lays down his life” for the gospel. This is not just being willing to die for the Lord, but also being willing to live for Him in the face of opposition, persecution, and tribulation.

Used twenty-nine times in twenty-eight chapters, *witness* is a key word in Acts. Luke used it as both a noun and a verb. It is important to be a witness or testimony with your life, but it is equally important to go and witness with your testimony. A true witness has impact on the souls of men and women around them. That is the purpose of the *dunamis*.

“A true witness delivereth souls: but a deceitful witness speaketh lies” (Proverbs 14:25).

**ARE YOU A TRUE WITNESS?**

**What Have You Learned?**

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. What was Peter’s great confession concerning Jesus?

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2. Why can’t the gates of Hell prevail against the church?

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3. What did Jesus purchase with His own blood?

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4. Who is the author of Acts? What was his background?

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5. What does the name "Theophilus" mean?

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6. According to Luke 24:44-49, what commands did Jesus give His disciples prior to His ascension?

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7. What was the last thing Jesus did on earth with His disciples?

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8. What did Jesus tell the disciples to wait for in Jerusalem?

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9. By what three things did the first-century church prove that Jesus was alive?

A. 

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B. 

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C. 

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10. What is the Holy Ghost?

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11. What did the disciples ask Jesus about the Kingdom?

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12. What is the difference between *chronos* and *kairos*?

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13. What is the difference between *exousia* and *dunamis*?

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14. Acts centers on which two apostles and which two cities?

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15. What must a real witness for Christ be willing to do?

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## Lesson 2

# Acts 1:9-26

### Recap

*After Peter declared that Jesus is the Son of God (see Matthew 16:16), Jesus said to him:*

*“And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:18-19).*

*If God gave Peter the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, we need to obey what Peter said and do what he did in the Book of Acts.*

*The church of the living God is the only thing that cannot be shaken. The church is an amazing institution. It is unique in the world. The gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. Individual saints and local assemblies may have problems, but the church is as solid as the rock of revelation it is built upon.*

- *The earth is to be shaken (Isaiah 2:19-21).*
- *The nation of Israel is to be shaken (Ezekiel 38:19-20).*
- *The heavens and the nations are to be shaken (Haggai 2:6-7).*
- *Everything that can be shaken will be shaken (Hebrews 12:26-29).*

*However, the church cannot be shaken. The gates of Hell cannot prevail against it because Jesus is building His church.*

## Acts 1:9-11

“And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:9-11).

### **If Jesus hadn't ascended . . .**

*If Jesus hadn't ascended, we would not have the Holy Ghost. Consider the following verses of Scripture:*

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you” (John 16:7).

“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26).

Jesus is the Comforter, for He said, “I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you” (John 14:18). The Holy Ghost is not different from Jesus, apart from Jesus, or a different person or personality from Jesus. The Holy Ghost is Jesus. You need the Holy Ghost because it is Jesus in you, the Comforter.

*Comfortless (Gr. orfanos) means “orphan, fatherless, bereaved.” “I will not leave you orphaned.”*

*Comforter (Gr. parakletos) means “called alongside to assist.”*

*If Jesus hadn't ascended, His earthly work would not have been multiplied. Consider these verses of Scripture:*

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, 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 church is not supposed to be a religious institution that has a beautiful memorial service once a week for a dead savior.
- The church is to be engaged in doing the same activities that Jesus did.
- The church is to do greater works than God manifested in flesh.
  - The Holy Ghost has now been given, and thousands of people in every time zone have and can experience the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. That did not happen when Jesus was physically on earth.
  - There are more of us. When Jesus was on earth, He could be in only one location, for example, only in Galilee or only in Jerusalem. Now He indwells thousands of believers around the world and confirms their words with signs following.

“And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen” (Mark 16:20).

*If Jesus hadn't ascended, He could not have begun His heavenly work.* Because He ascended, we now have a high priest on duty in Heaven working for us, interceding for us. Every time we falter, we can go boldly to the High Priest to make sacrifice for us, because “he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25). Consider:

“Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:14-16).

“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (I John 2:1).

*Advocate (parakletos) means, “comforter.”* John is the only writer in the Bible that uses this terminology. In his epistle, he used it in the sense of a lawyer, counselor, or a defense attorney.

## Angels

Angels appear periodically in the Book of Acts to work *for* the saints, but the Holy Ghost is constantly there working *through* the saints. The writer of Hebrews stated, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14). The heirs of salvation are the church.

Peter wrote, "Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into" (I Peter 1:12).

The Holy Ghost is stronger than any angel is. The angels are jealous of the Holy Ghost experience and desire to look into it.

### **This same Jesus . . . shall so come in like manner.**

"Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty" (Revelation 1:7-8).

Don't worry about who or what are the horns, the signs, or the seals. The next thing on the agenda of the church is not the Antichrist but the coming of Jesus Christ.

"*Why stand ye gazing up into Heaven?*" (This is an angelic rebuke. "Don't just stand there . . . go do something!")

## **Acts 1:12-14**

"Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with

one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren" (Acts 1:12-14).

This upper room is likely the same one where Jesus and His disciples held the Last Supper.

Notice the composition of the "Day of Pentecost" group:

- the eleven apostles (minus Judas)
- the women (who followed Jesus and His apostles – Luke 8:1-3)
- Mary, the mother of Jesus
- Jesus' brethren, who didn't believe before His resurrection (John 7:5 states, "For neither did his brethren believe in him.")

If a religion honors Peter or Mary above other disciples, please note that the Scriptures do not do this. Also, note that both Peter and Mary were in the upper room. They both repented; they both were baptized in Jesus' name; they both received the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in other tongues. How much do you honor them if you do not share their same Pentecostal experience?

### **"One Accord"**

The one hundred and twenty were in "one accord." This phrase occurs six times in Acts.

How easy it would have been for someone to bring division into this beautiful assembly of humble people. The members of the Lord's family might have claimed special recognition. They could have criticized Peter for his cowardly denial of the Savior. John might have proudly reminded the others that he had faithfully stood at the cross, and that the Savior had even chosen him to care for His mother. However, none of this happened. In fact, for the first time none of the disciples was arguing over who among them was the greatest.

*Homothymadon* is a compound Greek word that literally means "one passion." The one hundred twenty believers were of one passion to worship God.

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew

that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore" (Psalm 133:1-3).

## Prayer

Prayer is everywhere in the Book of Acts.

The believers prayed for guidance in making decisions (Acts 1:15-26) and for courage to witness for Christ (Acts 4:23-31). In fact, prayer was a normal part of their daily ministry (Acts 2:42-47; 3:1; 6:4). Stephen prayed as he was being stoned (Acts 7:55-60). Peter and John prayed for the Samaritans (Acts 8:14-17), and Saul of Tarsus prayed after his conversion (Acts 9:11). Peter prayed before he raised Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9:36-43). Cornelius prayed that God would show him how to be saved (Acts 10:1-4), and Peter was on the housetop praying when God told him how to be the answer to Cornelius's prayers (Acts 10:9).

The believers in John Mark's house prayed for Peter when he was in prison, and the Lord delivered him both from prison and from death (Acts 12:1-11). The church at Antioch fasted and prayed before sending out Barnabas and Paul (Acts 13:1-3) and upon ordaining elders (Acts 14:23). It was at a prayer meeting in Philippi that God opened Lydia's heart (Acts 16:13), and another prayer meeting in Philippi opened the prison doors (Acts 16:25). Paul prayed for his friends before leaving them (Acts 20:36; 21:5). In the midst of the storm, he prayed for God's blessing (Acts 27:35), and after the storm, he prayed that God would heal a sick man (Acts 28:8).

Almost every chapter in Acts contains a reference to prayer. Acts makes it very clear that something happens when God's people pray.

*Prayer is both the thermometer and the thermostat of the local church; for the "spiritual temperature" goes up or down depending on prayer. If you turn up the thermostat of prayer, you turn up the fire in the church*

## Acts 1:15-26

"And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,) Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before

concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood. For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take. Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles" (Acts 1:15-26).

Notice that (1) this is the only time the early church ever made a decision using lots, and (2) this is not a vote. With votes, you always have politics, and you always have winners and losers. So when faced with a decision, the early church drew straws and trusted the Lord to guide them rather than hold a vote.

"The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD" (Proverbs 16:33).

*"From which Judas by transgression fell" is one of the most tragic statements in Scripture.*

Some people claim the disciples made a mistake in choosing Matthias. They feel that Paul was actually the one God chose for this role, and their argument is that Matthias was never heard of again after Acts 1. However, except for Peter and John, none of the original twelve are mentioned by name in the Book of Acts after chapter one.

Paul's apostleship was different. He wasn't an eyewitness of Jesus' earthly ministry like the original twelve—but he was still an apostle. He stated:

“For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time” (I Corinthians 15:3-8).

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

*Over five hundred people saw Jesus alive after His resurrection, but only one hundred and twenty made it to the upper room for Pentecost. Likewise, many have heard the preaching of end-time revival, but who will be there when it happens?*

## **Paul**

Paul said he was “born out of due time.” He used *ektromah*, which is a compound Greek word meaning “untimely birth, miscarriage, or born wounded.” If you listen to Paul in his writings, he said, “I wasn’t a part of the original Twelve. I wasn’t one who was there to see the resurrected Christ. I was born out of due time. I’m the least of all the apostles. I’m just a sinner. I’m unworthy to be an apostle, for I was one that persecuted the church and tried to stamp out the message of Christ. I was born again with a disadvantage, but I still believe.”

Paul had so much baggage from his past. However, through the grace of God he became the major writer of the New Testament.

“Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:29).

Paul was the opening volley of the tens of thousands who should not have been born into the church but were. Paul stated, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (II Corinthians 5:17). Thanks be to God for His amazing grace!



## What Have You Learned?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. To whom did Jesus give the keys to the kingdom and why did He give them to this person?

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2. What is the only thing that cannot be shaken and why?

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3. Give three reasons it is important that Jesus ascended to Heaven.

A. 

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B. 

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C. 

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4. How did the angels say Jesus would return?

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5. Define *orfanos* and *parakletos*.

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6. What is the role of angels according to the writer of Hebrews?

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7. How will Jesus return?

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8. Who were in the upper room?

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9. What does "one accord" mean?

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10. What is both the thermometer and thermostat of the church? Why?

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11. How did the disciples chose a replacement for Judas?

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12. How was Paul's apostleship different from the original Twelve's?

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## Lesson 3

# Acts 2:1-4

### Recap

*To understand Acts 2, we need to go back to Matthew 16:18-19. Jesus said:*

*“And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:18-19).*

*The church is built upon Peter’s revelation that Jesus is the Son of God. Because of his revelation, Jesus gave Peter the keys to the Kingdom. Since He gave Peter the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, we need to obey what he said and do what he did in the Book of Acts.*

### Acts 2:1-4

*“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:1-4).*

### Pentecost

Long before Pentecost became a denomination, it was one of several annual Jewish feasts. *Pentecost* means “fiftieth”; the Jews celebrated Pentecost fifty days after the Feast of Firstfruits.

- Passover commemorated Israel’s deliverance from Egypt through the death of the Passover lamb.
  - Passover is the night that a lamb was slain and its blood was put on the doorposts and lintel.
  - The Israelites were told to go into the house, under the blood.
  - When the death angel went through the land of Egypt slaying the firstborn, he passed over any house that had the blood applied.
  - Passover is a type of the shedding of Christ’s blood for our atonement.
  - Jesus was slain on Passover.
- Firstfruits commemorated the start of the barley harvest, when a priest used the first sheaf of grain for a wave offering, symbolizing that the entire harvest belonged to the Lord.
  - Jesus is the “firstfruits from the dead” because He was the first one to arise from the dead by His own power.
  - Jesus arose from the dead on the Feast of Firstfruits. He was the first “sheaf.”
  - His resurrection points to the time when the entire church—whether dead or alive—will arise to be with Christ.
- Pentecost commemorated the end of the wheat harvest, when a priest waved two loaves of leavened bread, symbolizing the nation’s thanks to God for the entire harvest.
  - The two loaves indicated the end-time harvest will extend beyond the Jews.
  - The two loaves represented both the Jews and the Gentiles.
  - We Gentiles are the second loaf.

Jesus died on Passover as the Lamb of God.

“The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).  
 “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (I Corinthians 5:7).

Jesus was more than just a rabbi that an angry mob killed. Jesus was the Passover Lamb, shedding His blood so that someday sinners in our culture could kneel and pray, "Father, forgive me," and have their sins covered by Calvary's flow. The blood covers every sin.

Jesus was also first of the "harvest" to rise from the dead.

"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming" (I Corinthians 15:20-23).

Because Jesus came out of the grave, someday graves will open and the church will arise to meet Jesus.

Jesus accomplished something through His Spirit on Pentecost. Jesus said, "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you." The Holy Ghost is nothing other than the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The One who died on the cross is no longer dead. The one who was buried is no longer lying in the tomb. Jesus Christ is alive by His Spirit and He fills the church. Jesus is the spirit of Pentecost.

The church was born on Pentecost. It is made of both Jews and Gentiles.

"But now in Christ Jesus ye [Gentiles] who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby" (Ephesians 2:13-16).

Pentecost in the Old Testament marked the day that Moses received the Law on Mount Sinai, written by God on tables of stone. Pentecost in the New Testament marks the day that God began to write the law in human hearts by the Holy Spirit. Paul stated:

“Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart” (II Corinthians 3:3).

The Holy Ghost is not an option. It is not extra equipment. It is not an accessory. The Holy Ghost is the fundamental power of God that comes into a human life and gives us power to live an overcoming life. The reason so many Christians who attend church only as a religious activity are powerless is that the Holy Ghost moves so little in the lives of many so-called Christians.

The same Holy Ghost that empowered the first-century church is the same Holy Ghost that is working around the world today in the twenty-first century. If the twenty-first-century church would get as hungry for the power of God as the first-century church, we would see the same outpouring of His Spirit. If you have not received this gift, it is not because God is withholding it from you. He wants to pour it out on *all flesh*. They all began to speak in other tongues. He wants to give it to *everybody*.

Since the Holy Ghost has come, no one needs to tarry for the Holy Ghost. The one hundred and twenty waited in the upper room as Jesus commanded only until the Day of Pentecost was fully come. Since then, no one needs to wait to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

### **“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come” (2:1).**

The phrase “was fully come” literally means “was being fulfilled.” This Day of Pentecost would be different from every past Day of Pentecost. Just as Pentecost couldn’t have happened before Passover and Firstfruits on the calendar, the Holy Spirit couldn’t have been poured out until Jesus first died, was buried, and then rose from the dead.

“In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified)” (John 7:37-39).

“If you believe as the Scripture has said” means you can’t make up your own doctrine. It has to be according to the Bible.

The Holy Ghost is associated with birth. *Belly* (Gr. *koilia*) means “womb.” Something is in you that cannot be born until it is filled with the Holy Ghost. No one can live as a Christian should without the empowerment of the Holy Ghost. It’s for all people.

In the Old Testament, wind and fire sometimes accompanied God’s presence. For example, consider Elijah at Mount Horeb in I Kings 19. This time it would rest individually on believers as a sign that Pentecost was being fulfilled.

In Hebrew and Greek, the terms *spirit* and *wind* are the same word.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). No one can see the wind. One can only see the effect of wind blowing: a flag unfurled, branches of a tree moving, grass rippling. Similarly, one can’t see the Holy Ghost, but one certainly can see the change the Holy Ghost makes in an individual.

“And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost” (John 20:22).

The disciples did not receive the Holy Ghost when Jesus breathed on them, for He commanded them to tarry in Jerusalem until they received the promise of the Father. His breathing on them was a prophetic action.

Consider what Ezekiel did in the Old Testament:

“Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army” (Ezekiel 37:9-10).

When the wind of God—His breath, His Spirit—comes into a life, it is all over for the devil, the effects of sin, and the impact of all your past, for the Holy Spirit will make you into a great warrior of God.

In Creation, the Bible specifically states that God formed Adam from the dust of the earth and breathed into him the breath of life. But Adam and Eve lost that because the breath of life is more than oxygen coming into the body and the body expelling the carbon dioxide. Adam and Eve had an inner breath—a spiritual breath. They walked with God in the cool of the evening. They knew God. They fellowshiped with God.

That is how we were created to be. Some people are so frustrated with life because they were created to house the breath of God—not just oxygen, not just lungs puffing in and out. We are created to house the breath of God. So many people walk around empty not because they can't catch their breath, but because they have never experienced the breath of God's Spirit. That was lost in the Fall.

For hundreds of years there were religion, sacrifices, Tabernacle, Temple, priests, prophets, kings, and history. Not until Acts 2 do we find the wind of God coming back into human life. They were all filled with the Holy Ghost.

Something else moved into the room: tongues of fire. Any Jewish person would immediately associate tongues of fire with the golden lampstand of the Tabernacle. The cloven tongues of fire (divided to individuals) symbolize the lighting of the lamps on the golden candlestick in the Tabernacle. The church is to be a light.

“And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength” (Revelation 1:12-16).

John the Baptist stated, “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Matthew 3:11-12).



Jesus said, "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16).

People did not have electricity in Bible times. Fire was the only light a person could use to dispel darkness. The spiritual parallel to this is that the only light that can dispel the darkness for a sin-sick soul is the fire kindled by the Holy Ghost. The writer of Hebrews stated, "For our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29).

In Acts 1, we see Jesus leaving His disciples and going to Heaven; in Acts 2, we see Jesus returning to His disciples through the Holy Ghost. The four Gospels show Christ with His disciples. The Book of Acts shows Christ in them.

"To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

"Among the Gentiles" should not be in this verse. We should never have received this. We should never have been a part of this. We can never deserve this. "Among the Gentiles" would not be in this verse except for the Book of Acts. The riches, the glory, the mystery is "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Paul was not writing from a weird metaphysical, fictional, or sci-fi sense. Instead, he was writing from a correct theological perspective stating that when you receive God's Spirit into you, you receive Christ, the hope of glory. That is why Acts 2:4 states, "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

They were all filled with the Holy Ghost. No exceptions. They all began to speak in other tongues. You will know you have the Holy Ghost because you speak with other tongues. That gift has been loosed in the church in the twenty-first century. It is the power of God unto salvation. That gift is power from on high. That gift is Christ in you, the hope of glory. It is power to live above sin.

*The Scripture still applies. Everyone can receive the gift of the Holy Ghost!*

## What Have You Learned?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. Upon what did Jesus build the church?

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2. List three of the annual Jewish feasts.

A. \_\_\_\_\_

B. \_\_\_\_\_

C. \_\_\_\_\_

3. What does *Pentecost* mean? What is its significance?

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4. What did the Feast of Pentecost celebrate?

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5. What did the Feast of Firstfruits celebrate?

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6. What did the Feast of Passover celebrate?

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7. When was the church born?

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8. Contrast Pentecost in the Old Testament with Pentecost in the New Testament.

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9. Why is the Holy Ghost not optional?

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10. What is the literal meaning of the phrase “was fully come”?

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11. What is the significance of the phrase “if you believe as the Scripture has said”?

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12. What two things are associated with upper room experience? What do they symbolize?

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13. Why is the phrase “among the Gentiles” important in Colossians 1:27?

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14. How many of the one hundred and twenty in the upper room received the Holy Ghost?

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15. What is the initial sign a person has received the Holy Ghost?

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## Lesson 4

# Acts 2:5-21

### Recap

*In Acts 1, we see Jesus leaving His disciples and going to Heaven. In Acts 2, we see Jesus returning to His disciples through the Holy Ghost. He did not come back in bodily form. He did not come back to be crucified. He did not come back as a baby in a manger. He came back through the power of His Spirit, also known as the Holy Ghost.*

*In the Gospels, Jesus is with the disciples; in the Book of Acts, He is in them. If people really want to be the church of Jesus Christ in the twenty-first century, they have to have the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Jesus, in them.*

*As stated in lesson 3, the phrase “was fully come” literally means, “was being fulfilled.” Since the giving of the Law, Judaism has always had a Pentecost. However, this Day of Pentecost would be different from every past Day of Pentecost. This year was going to be more than a formal ceremony, a ritual, or a feast day. That is why we read in Acts 2:4, “And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”*

*The prayer for the twenty-first-century church is that they all be filled with the Holy Ghost. This is what happens when people receive the Holy Ghost: “They . . . all . . . [begin] to speak in other tongues.” Don’t let anyone tell you that you can receive the Spirit of Jesus into your life without this happening. Don’t let anyone cheat you out of the supernatural power of God. They all began to speak in unknown tongues as the Spirit gave utterance.*

### **What is the Holy Ghost?**

- ***The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of Christ.***

*“And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Romans 8:10-13).*

*What is the Holy Ghost? It is the Spirit of Jesus that comes into a life. That same resurrection power that lifted Jesus from the dead is there to lift you out of addiction, to lift you out of sin, to lift you out of shame, to lift you out of guilt. It is the same power. It is not a different god. It is not a part of God. It is not a part of a committee sent from Heaven. It is Jesus, the Spirit of Christ in you. That is what the Holy Ghost is.*

- ***The Holy Ghost is a baptism.***

*“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).*

*The Spirit that ties the church together around the globe is not a denominational structure. It is not a committee that formed some doctrine. It is not just a bunch of shared ideologies. What ties the church together is the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Something happens when Jesus Christ comes into you. You are baptized into one body.*

- ***The Holy Ghost is a birth.***

*“Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:5-8).*

*You can't see wind with your physical eyes, but you can see and feel the effects. You can see wind's effect in strange weather patterns. You can feel it on your face. However, you cannot tell from where it came or to where it will go.*

*Everyone born of the Spirit is like that. You won't understand them by studying their religion in a textbook. However, if you get the same power in you, you will understand they are following after the Spirit.*

- ***The Holy Ghost is living water.***

*"Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:13-14).*

*God gets tired of dead, dry, boring church, because if you are full of the Holy Ghost, a well of living water will be springing up in your soul. Every once in a while, it just starts springing up and splashes over to someone else. They start feeling it and moving in it. Jesus said the Spirit is supposed to be like an artesian well that springs up from deep down in your soul. It is living water.*

*"He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)" (John 7:38-39).*

*Jesus has already been crucified, buried, resurrected, and glorified. And the Holy Ghost is given. It is for everyone.*

- ***The Holy Ghost is the Comforter.***

*"If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:15-18).*

*Keeping the commandments of God is more difficult than it looks on the surface. The commandments of God will fight your flesh. The commandments of God will pit you against culture. The commandments of God will put you at odds with the old life that you were comfortably living. However, Jesus said if you love Me, you would keep My commandments.*

*We need help. That help is the Comforter that will abide with us forever – even the Spirit of truth. That Comforter is Jesus, for He said, "I will not leave you comfortless: I*

*will come to you.” Jesus is the Holy Ghost. Consequently, when you receive the Holy Ghost, Jesus moves in.*

- ***The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of adoption.***

*“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Romans 8:14-16).*

*Tens of thousands of people have walked to the front at crusades and church services and made a mental profession of a supposed faith. A week later, you can't find them near God, the Bible, or church. Why? While they made a profession and did their best, no power moved in to help them live above sin.*

*The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of adoption that allows you to walk through the world, not arrogantly, crudely, or rudely, but confidently. You can say, “I'm the son (or daughter) of the living God. My Savior died for me. My Savior arose for me. My Savior lives in me.”*

- ***The Holy Ghost is a seal and the earnest of our inheritance.***

*“In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:13-14).*

*In olden days, pressing the signet ring of the author or official into melted wax on the document authenticated the certificate or message. Likewise, the same procedure on a scroll or envelope attested that the document had not been opened. The Holy Ghost authenticates and attests to the promises we have from Jesus Christ.*

*The earnest of our inheritance is the down payment pointing to something that is coming later. The Holy Ghost in you is a down payment of what is coming later. If you have ever been excited in church, it is a down payment of what you are going to feel at the rapture of the church when you walk into Heaven for the first time. If you have ever been worshiping God and felt in awe of His goodness and mercy, that is a down payment of the awe you will feel when you get to Heaven and see Jesus for the first time.*

- ***The Holy Ghost is power from on high.***



*“And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).*

*The power you need doesn't come from your money, your education, or your social skill. The power you need to please the God that made you and to make Heaven your home is power from on high. That is the Holy Ghost.*

### **Why did God choose speaking in other tongues?**

- *God is sovereign and can do what He wants to do (Isaiah 40:13-14).*
- *The Bible says the mouth speaks from the heart (Matthew 12:34).*
- *Our speech is our chief means of expression (Proverbs 18:20-21).*
- *The tongue is the most difficult part of the body to control (James 3:2-8).*
- *Speaking in tongues is a universal, external sign (Acts 11:15-17).*
- *God uses things that are “foolish” to do His will (I Corinthians 1:25-29).*
- *Speaking in tongues reverses the confusion of the Tower of Babel.*
- *Speaking in tongues shows God's love for people of all nations.*
- *God regularly used outward signs to accompany His covenants.*
- *Speaking in tongues provides certainty at a definite point in time.*

*It is critical to note that every believer in the Book of Acts received the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in other tongues. There were no exceptions. A Christian who does not speak with other tongues does not exist in your Bible. A church that is not Spirit filled does not exist in your Bible. We see this proved everywhere in Acts.*

*Later on in the Epistles, as the church matured, Paul taught them concerning the gifts of the Spirit. He spoke of something called “divers kinds of tongues” that is one of nine supernatural gifts given to the church. In that teaching, he said things like, “Do all speak with tongues?” (I Corinthians 12:30). Don't let anyone confuse you on this point: the “gift of tongues” is an utterance in an unknown language in a church meeting that must be interpreted into the language of the hearers by another gift of the Spirit called “interpretation of tongues.” Not every member of the Body receives these supernatural gifts to use in the church—but every Bible believer speaks in other tongues.*

*“To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will” (I Corinthians 12:10-11).*

*“If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret” (I Corinthians 14:27).*

*The sign of tongues is evidence that believers are filled with the Holy Ghost. The gift of tongues (with interpretation) is for edification of the church.*

## **Acts 2:5-13**

“And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine” (Acts 2:5-13).

When the Holy Ghost was poured out, some observers were amazed, some doubted, and some mocked—which is just like today.

The multitude’s question to the apostles was, “What meaneth this?” (What is “this”? Obviously, it is the speaking in tongues they were observing.)

Peter then stood up to preach the very first sermon in church history—and he answered their question, “What meaneth this?” with the words, “This is that!” (What is “that”? Obviously, it is the outpouring of God’s Spirit that the prophet Joel said would happen in the last days.) Joel never even mentioned speaking in tongues, but Peter connected the dots.

Since the early church had no “New Testament” yet, Peter appealed to the Old Testament. His sermon started with Joel and ended with Jesus.

## Acts 2:14-21

“But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; and it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: and I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:14-21).

Joel’s prophecy said nothing about speaking in other tongues. His prophecy paints a picture of God pouring out His Spirit on all flesh. It had never happened before. His Spirit had moved on people. God’s Spirit had moved among people. His Spirit had made people fall on their backs, fall on their face, kneel, cry, shout, and weep. However, this was different. Joel said there is coming a day when God will pour out His Spirit on all people—not just Jews, not just religious people, not just those that know all of the Old Testament feast days, but all people.

Peter was the spokesperson. Remember, Jesus said, “You are Peter and upon this rock of revelation I will build my church.” Then He gave Peter the keys to the Kingdom. Peter took the keys and began to unlock some things.

Joel had said nothing about speaking in tongues. However, Peter made the connection. He said the speaking in other tongues that the multitude heard was the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy of God pouring out His Spirit. Hence, if you want to receive the same outpouring of the Spirit of God that people around the world are receiving in these last days, then you need to hunger and thirst for the same experience that will allow you to speak in other tongues. It was that way on the first day of church history; it is the same way today.

Joel wasn’t the only Old Testament prophet to see it.

“But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jeremiah 31:33).

Jeremiah said a day was coming when the Law would not be a list of dos and don'ts which men and women would carry around with them, but God would write His law in their hearts. As they went about their day, the power of God that lived within them would prompt them about what to do and what not to do by.

The writer of Hebrews quoted Jeremiah and made it very clear that Jeremiah had been referring to the Holy Ghost.

“Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them” (Hebrews 10:15-16).

The prophet Isaiah saw this day coming. 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).

Isaiah said God would speak to His people with stammering lips and another tongue. Paul quoted Isaiah in I Corinthians 14 when writing about the giftings and workings of the Holy Ghost. He stated, “In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord” (I Corinthians 14:21).

Pentecost was always in Jewish history, but now it was an experience.

## **What Have You Learned?**

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. List five things that the Holy Ghost is.

- A. \_\_\_\_\_
- B. \_\_\_\_\_
- C. \_\_\_\_\_
- D. \_\_\_\_\_
- E. \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is the meaning of the phrase “earnest of our inheritance”?

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\_\_\_\_\_

3. List five reasons God chose to use other tongues as a sign of the Holy Ghost.

- A. \_\_\_\_\_
- B. \_\_\_\_\_
- C. \_\_\_\_\_
- D. \_\_\_\_\_
- E. \_\_\_\_\_

4. How do we know that speaking in other tongues is evidence that the believer has been filled with the Holy Ghost?

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\_\_\_\_\_

5. List five of the nations represented in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost.

- A. \_\_\_\_\_
- B. \_\_\_\_\_
- C. \_\_\_\_\_
- D. \_\_\_\_\_
- E. \_\_\_\_\_

6. What is the difference between the evidence of tongues and the gift of tongues? \_\_\_\_\_

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7. Which Old Testament prophet did Peter quote in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost?

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8. Who said that God would write His law in the hearts of men and women?

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## Lesson 5

# Acts 2:22-47

### Recap

*The Book of Acts explains how the early church – the first church, the original church – acted and believed. To understand Acts, we must go back to a passage in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus said:*

*“And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:18-19).*

*The church is built upon the revelation that Peter had: Jesus is the Son of God. The gates of Hell cannot prevail against this revelation. Consequently, because of Peter’s revelation, Jesus gave him the keys to the kingdom of Heaven. Keys represent authority to open something, to unlock something. Since Peter received the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, we need to obey what he said and do what he did in the Book of Acts.*

*As Acts chapter 2 records, the first day of church history was the Day of Pentecost. It was the first time the Holy Spirit came down upon humanity. Jesus had told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high. That power would propel and guide the church He started. This church is not a denomination. This church is not a religion. This church in its original form is an experience from God.*

*Luke recorded, “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1). They were in Jerusalem waiting as Jesus had instructed. As they waited, something incredible happened. When the Day of Pentecost*

*was being fulfilled, “They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4).*

*When the Holy Spirit comes into an individual, supernatural evidence occurs. It is universal—it happens to everyone who receives God’s Spirit. On the Day of Pentecost, the believers spoke in other tongues as the Holy Ghost filled them. That still happens today, around the world, in different countries, in different ethnic groups, in different cultures.*

*To explain what the multitude was witnessing, Peter appealed to the Old Testament. (The church did not have the New Testament yet.) His sermon started with the prophet Joel and ended with Jesus. Joel said:*

*“But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. . . . And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:16-21).*

*Everyone wants to be saved. Joel said, “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” To call upon the Lord, we must know (1) who is Lord, and (2) how to call on Him. Peter answered who and how in his sermon.*

## **Acts 2:22-24**

*“Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it” (Acts 2:22-24).*

*The who was none other than Jesus of Nazareth, whom they crucified. The people in Peter’s audience had heard about Jesus’ miracle ministry. Although men crucified Jesus, it was all in the plan of God. Paul later said:*



“But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (I Corinthians 2:7-8).

The Hebrew word translated *pains* in verse 24 is the same word used for “birth pains.” The *tomb* in which Jesus was placed became the *womb* of the resurrection. Paul explained:

“And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept” (I Corinthians 15:17-20).

## **Acts 2:25-31**

Peter continued his sermon, declaring:

“For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption” (Acts 2:25-31).

Peter quoted Psalm 16:8-11, where David prophesied about the LORD, saying that it was impossible for Him to stay in the grave. Obviously, David couldn't have been talking about himself, because his body was still in a sepulcher in Jerusalem (adjacent to the upper room). Nevertheless, David had a

promise from God that the Messiah would come from his lineage. In II Samuel 7:12-13, the prophet Nathan gave David a message from Jehovah:

“And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.”

## **Acts 2:32-35**

Peter continued his sermon, emphasizing the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

“This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he [Jesus] hath shed forth this [the Holy Ghost], which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool” (Acts 2:32-35).

Peter’s point here is that Jesus said if He went back to Heaven, He would send the Holy Ghost—so since the Holy Ghost had been poured out, Jesus must be alive and in Heaven. Jesus is in the place of authority. Years later Peter wrote, “Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him” (I Peter 3:22).

Once again, David couldn’t have been talking about himself, for he never did this. Peter quoted a prophecy of David in Psalm 110:1, “The LORD [Jehovah] said unto my Lord [adonai], Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.”

This is the same thing that happened during the baptism of Jesus when the voice from Heaven, the Spirit of God, said—speaking about the body He inhabited, “This is my beloved Son.” Likewise, this is the same thing that happened in the Garden of Gethsemane, where the humanity of Jesus submitted to the deity of Jesus and said, “Not my will, but thine be done.”

Jesus knew about whom David was talking:

“While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?” (Matthew 22:41-45).

“The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all” (I Corinthians 15:26-28).

Jesus conquered the “last (worst) enemy” first, by rising from the dead on Easter morning. Now all of His enemies have become His footstool. Since Jesus conquered the worst enemy (death) first, He is able to defeat all of our other enemies.

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:5-11).

## **Acts 2:36**

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

This is the punch line of Peter’s sermon; it is both a declaration and an accusation. God came as your Messiah, and you crucified Him!

The Jews didn't actually crucify Jesus; the Romans did. However, they were just as guilty because they didn't receive Him when He came to them. And today we are just as guilty if we don't receive Him.

"He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:10-13).

Peter told them *who* the Lord was, and now he was going to tell them *how* to call on Him so their sins could be forgiven. Since Peter received the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, we had better pay attention and do exactly what he said if we want to be saved.

While many modern Christian groups preach the gospel (the "good news"), not many groups preach the Bible way to obey the gospel. Just like any other commandment in Scripture, to know it or even to believe in it is not enough—we must *obey* God's commandments.

The New Testament Greek word for *believe* doesn't mean just to mentally acknowledge something. It is a synonym for *commit*—as in believing something so strongly that it causes you to *do* something. *Believe* and *commit* are the same word in the Greek language.

What is the gospel anyway? Paul defined it specifically, and he let us know that there are three parts to this "good news":

"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (I Corinthians 15:1-4).

*The gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

That is why in the very first church service in church history, after the very first sermon preached by one of the apostles, after the very first time someone ever asked, "What shall we do?" and at the very first "altar call" in the church age, Peter said to obey the gospel by doing three things:

### **Acts 2:37-38**

"Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:37-38).

*Obeying the gospel is repenting (death), being baptized in Jesus' name (burial), and receiving the Holy Ghost (resurrection). These are the keys; this is how you get into the Kingdom.*

Why did Peter preach this message? Peter preached it because it was the very last instruction that Jesus left with His disciples before He ascended. In Luke 24:45-51, the physician Luke recorded:

Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.

Jesus said, "I will be crucified, be buried and then rise again . . . and because of this I want you to go out and preach repentance, baptism (remission of sins) in My name, and the baptism of the Holy Ghost (the promise of my Father)."

The very last thing Jesus did on earth with His disciples was to emphasize how to obey the gospel—and Peter preached this very same message in Acts 2:38.

## **Repentance**

The first step is repentance. In repentance, you apply the death of Jesus to your life. He died for you, so you die to your old sinful life, to your old will. You turn around and walk away. That is repentance.

Repentance is not just “accepting” the good news, and it is not just feeling “sorry” for your sins. It is being sorry enough to *change*. In writing to the Corinthian church, Paul stated:

“For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter” (II Corinthians 7:10-11).

Repentance is not a feeling, not just an emotion. It is a “turning around” or an “about face”—an inward change of attitude leading to an outward change of action. Unless both of these occur, repentance has not taken place. Matthew 3:8 states, “Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.”

*Repentance is absolutely necessary for salvation.*

“I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3).

Repentance is a good beginning, but it is not enough.

## **Baptism**

The second step in obeying the gospel is baptism in Jesus’ name. Peter said baptism was for the remission of sin—the washing away of every record and trace of your sins. If Jesus can conquer our worst enemy, death, then He certainly has the power to remove the stain of sin.

The power of baptism is not in the water, and certainly, it is not in the preacher. The power to remit sin is in the name of Jesus.

What is baptism?

- Baptism is putting on Christ. Galatians 3:27 states, “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”
- Baptism is a burial with Christ. Romans 6:4 states, “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

This is why it is crucial to be immersed in water (burial) in the name of Jesus Christ (the One who was buried for us). Every Christian in the Bible was baptized by immersion in Jesus’ name. Consider water baptism in the Book of Acts:

- The converts of the Day of Pentecost were baptized in the “name of Jesus Christ”—Acts 2:38.
- The Samaritan believers were baptized in the “name of the Lord Jesus”—Acts 8:16.
- Cornelius’s household was baptized in the “name of the Lord”—Acts 10:48.
- The disciples of John were baptized in the “name of the Lord Jesus”—Acts 19:5

What about Matthew 28:19?

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28:18-19).

- Jesus said, “I am come in my Father’s name”—John 5:43.
- The angel said, “Thou shalt call his name Jesus”—Matthew 1:21.
- Jesus said, “The Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name”—John 14:26.

Matthew didn’t write his gospel until AD 62. He was making a theological statement about the oneness of God that the early church had confirmed over thirty years by baptizing every convert in the name of Jesus Christ.

*Baptism is essential for salvation.*

Jesus stated in John 20:23, “Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.”

Does the church have power to forgive sins? No, only Jesus does. So what does this verse mean? Whomever we baptize has their sins remitted (“washed away”); whomever we do not baptize still has their sin.

Jesus also said in Mark 16:16, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

Repentance and baptism in Jesus’ name are good, but still not enough.

## **Holy Ghost**

The third step in obeying the gospel is receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. This is what Joel was talking about in his prophecy. If you repent and walk away from your sinful past and are baptized in Jesus’ name, then God will give you the Holy Ghost. Only God can give you this power from on high. This is the “promise of the Father” that the one hundred and twenty experienced on the Day of Pentecost. You can have the same experience today. You can be endued with power from on high.

### **What is the Holy Ghost?**

It is the Spirit and power of God that comes into a Christian’s life. In Acts 1:8 Jesus told the disciples, “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power” (I Corinthians 6:14).

The new birth experience is designed to let your old life die (repentance) and be buried (baptism), and to give you a literal new life by the power of the Holy Ghost. The point of the resurrection is not just that Jesus got up from the grave, but that I can get up out of the deadness of my old life.

- Jesus’ being put to death was an act of men.
- Jesus’ burial was an act of men.



- But Jesus' resurrection was an act of God.
- Repentance is my action in response to the gospel.
- Baptism is my action in response to the gospel.
- But the Holy Ghost is God's action in response to my obedience.

"But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Romans 8:11).

Jesus rose from the grave in a glorified body. He didn't need the stone rolled away to get out of the tomb. But the stone was rolled away as a sign to us that He had actually, literally risen from the dead. The Holy Ghost is God's Spirit—it encompasses much more than merely speaking in tongues. But speaking in tongues is given as a supernatural sign to us that we have actually, literally received the Holy Ghost.

Some say you can receive God's Spirit without speaking in tongues, but that's not what the Bible says. Every Christian in the Bible spoke in tongues. Here is the first time any Gentiles received the Holy Ghost:

"While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days" (Acts 10:44-48).

*The Holy Ghost is essential to salvation.*

"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Romans 8:9).

"Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost" (I Corinthians 12:3).

The baptism of the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in tongues is the original experience of the New Testament church, and that is our pattern—not church history, not denominations, but the Bible. That is why every Christian in your Bible was baptized in Jesus’ name, and every Christian in your Bible spoke with tongues:

- Isaiah prophesied of God speaking to His people through stammering lips and another tongue (Isaiah 28:9-12).
- When the church began on the Day of Pentecost, the disciples spoke in tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-4).
- Simon the Sorcerer observed “evidence” when the Samaritans received the Holy Ghost by laying on of hands (Acts 8:14-20).
- Cornelius’s household, who were Gentiles, spoke with other tongues when they received the Holy Ghost (Acts 10:44-48).
- Believers who had only experienced the baptism of John the Baptist were re-baptized and spoke with tongues (Acts 19:1-6).
- Paul had this experience (Acts 9:17-18), for he spoke with tongues more than anyone in the Corinthian church did (I Corinthians 14:18).

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

Since Jesus gave Peter the keys to the Kingdom, then we need to listen to what he said and do what he instructed on the Day of Pentecost. Thankfully, Peter did not stop with the three steps to salvation. He continued to preach with a promise:

### **Acts 2:39-41**

“For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:39-41).

Peter was saying, “The promise of the Father (v. 33) is for you (Jews) and your children (also Jews).” Initially, the message of salvation was given only to the Jews. However, Peter prophesied that it would be opened “to all that are afar

off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." This was for the Gentiles that would later receive and obey the gospel.

Years later, Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus:

"But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:13).

"For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:18-19).

The promise of the Holy Ghost to future generations and to those who were far off (Gentiles) did not complete Peter's sermon. Verse 40 indicates that with many other words he pleaded with the hearers to save themselves from the untoward generation. This was not the end of Peter's preaching, because the new birth is just an entrance into the kingdom of God. We still have to grow up and obey God's commandments to be saved from our own "untoward generation."

## **Acts 2:42-47**

"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:42-47).

The early church did more than make a few converts to a new religion. They made disciples that steadfastly continued daily in the doctrine, fellowship, lifestyle, and discipline of the apostles. These people literally invested everything they had into the church.

The Christians you meet in the Book of Acts were not content to meet once a week for “services as usual.” They met daily (Acts 2:46), cared daily (Acts 6:1), won souls daily (Acts 2:47), searched the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11), and increased in number daily (Acts 16:5). Their Christian faith was a day-to-day reality, not a once-a-week routine.

When we do what we are supposed to do every day, then God does what only He can do every day.

Have you called on the name of the Lord the way the Bible says?

## What Have You Learned?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. What Old Testament prophet did Peter quote in his sermon? What did the prophet prophesy?

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2. According to Peter’s sermon, what showed that Jesus was approved of God?

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3. Who was David’s LORD? Who was David’s son?

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4. According to I Corinthians 15:17-20, what would be three results if Christ had not risen from the dead?

A. \_\_\_\_\_

B. \_\_\_\_\_

C. \_\_\_\_\_

5. What was the promise from Jehovah that Nathan delivered to David?

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6. How did Jesus conquer the “last enemy”?

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7. Why were the Jews just as guilty in crucifying Jesus as the Romans?

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8. What is the gospel of Jesus Christ?

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9. How does one obey the gospel?

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10. What is repentance?

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11. What is the significance of baptism?

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12. What is the Holy Ghost? What is the initial sign someone has received it?

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13. Peter's recorded sermon in Acts 2 ends with what promise?

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14. According to Acts 2:42, the Holy Ghost filled believers continued in what four things?

- A. 

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- B. 

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- C. 

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- D. 

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15. How many souls were added to the church on the Day of Pentecost?

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## Lesson 6

# Acts 3:1-26

### Recap

*In Acts 2, Peter preached the first sermon in church history, and multitudes responded. Since the early church had no “New Testament” yet, he appealed to the Old Testament. His sermon started with the prophet Joel and ended with Jesus. He started in the Old Testament pointing toward the One who would come and who would pour out His Spirit. He ended with the King of kings and Lord of lords and the One who had sent forth His Spirit, which the multitude witnessed. He said, “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21). Peter preached (1) who the Lord is (vv. 22-24), and (2) how we are to call on Him for salvation (v. 38). About three thousand people believed and joined with the one hundred and twenty in speaking in other tongues.*

*The promise of the Holy Ghost to future generations and to those who were far off (Gentiles) did not complete Peter’s sermon (v. 39). Verse 40 indicates that with many other words he pleaded with the hearers to save themselves from the untoward generation. This was not the end of Peter’s preaching, because the new birth is just an entrance into the kingdom of God. We still have to grow up and obey God’s commandments to be saved from our own “untoward generation.”*

*“And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness*

*of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:42-47).*

*The early church did more than make converts—they made disciples who continued daily in the doctrine and disciplines of the apostles. These people literally invested everything they had into the church. The Christians you meet in the Book of Acts were not content to meet once a week for "services as usual." They met daily (Acts 2:46), cared daily (Acts 6:1), won souls daily (Acts 2:47), searched the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11), and increased in number daily (Acts 16:5). Their Christian faith was a day-to-day reality, not a once-a-week routine.*

*When we, the church, do what we are supposed to do every day, then God does what only He can do every day.*

### **Acts 3:1-3**

*"Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms" (Acts 3:1-3).*

These events cited above are fulfillment of Acts 2:47. The disciples lived every day for God. Peter and John's going to the Temple was the normal routine for Jews. The psalmist wrote, "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice" (Psalm 55:17). Peter and John were simply going about their daily living for Christ. When we do what we are supposed to do daily, then God will do daily what only He can do.

Peter and John were going to a Jewish prayer meeting, not an apostolic prayer meeting. People around them would be praying to Jehovah without the revelation that God had manifested Himself in flesh in the form of Jesus Christ. Some, especially the priests and rabbis, would be hostile to the apostles for proclaiming that Jesus was the Son of God.

In Acts 3 and 4, immediately after the Day of Pentecost, the emphasis is on the name of Jesus Christ. This is not a coincidence. A name is much more than just identification; it carries with it authority and power. The first concern of the



first Christians in the first century was to give glory to His name. The first church made a big deal out of the name of Jesus!

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matthew 28:18-20).

By saying, “All power is given to me in heaven and in earth,” Jesus reaffirmed that He is almighty God. Because He is God, He commissioned the disciples to preach and baptize in His *name*.

Matthew was not citing an alternate mode of baptism. He didn’t write his gospel until AD 62, thirty years after Acts. He was making a theological statement about the oneness of God that the early church had confirmed over thirty years by baptizing every convert in the name of Jesus Christ. (All church history books substantiate that all baptisms in the first century were in the name of Jesus.) What Matthew was saying is this: Jesus is the Father who created the world. Jesus is the Son who died on the cross. Jesus is the Holy Ghost who fills every believer.

Peter and John are often found together in the Gospels. They were partners in the fishing business (Luke 5:10); they prepared the last Passover for Jesus (Luke 22:8); they ran to the tomb on the first Easter Sunday morning (John 20:3-4); and they would later minister to the Samaritans who believed on Jesus Christ (Acts 8:14). Now that they were Spirit filled, these apostles were no longer competing for greatness, but were at last working faithfully together to build the church.

They were on their way to prayer, not on their way from prayer. But prayer meetings were not the only time that Christians prayed. They prayed every day.

### **Acts 3:4-11**

The lame man expected a good deed, but instead received a great miracle.

“And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I

have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God: and they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering" (Acts 3:4-11).

Peter said, "Silver and gold have I none," because he had been investing everything he had in the church. The newfound love the believers experienced in the Holy Ghost compelled them to care for the needs of the other believers. That is why Acts 2:44 states that they "had all things common."

Peter also said, "Such as I have give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." Notice the emphasis on the name of Jesus. Notice the power in the name of Jesus. The healing of the lame came through the name of Jesus. Peter did not have gold or silver, but he did have the name of Jesus.

The lame man dragged Peter and John along with him as he made his way to Solomon's Porch, telling everyone to look at what happened to him. The people gaped in amazement and wonder as the man joyfully testified. He demonstrated the power of a personal testimony.

John 10:23 indicates that Jesus had followed this same path as Peter and John. He had been in Solomon's Porch. Undoubtedly, He had passed this lame man many times, but He did not heal him. Instead, He left that miracle for His disciples—and church—to perform. Because of Peter and John, the lame man "entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God."

In chapter 9, John also recorded the disciples' question concerning the man born blind. "Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him" (John 9:3). Jesus healed this man, but left the lame man for His apostles to heal. He said to the Twelve, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, 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 lame man went with them into the Temple (v. 8). It is always the purpose of miracles (and alms!) to bring people into church fellowship. We are interested in crowds only so we can preach the gospel.

## **Acts 3:12-16**

Peter turned the Temple into a courtroom and laid out all the evidence for everybody to see. How could two ordinary fishermen perform such a great miracle? Peter's answer was, "Through the name of Jesus Christ."

*"And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all" (Acts 3:12-16).*

Scriptures use the title "Holy One" only for Jehovah God. However, it is used twice in direct reference to Jesus. Peter used it in accusing the Jews of crucifying the Holy One, as cited in the passage above.

The other time is when a devil-possessed man proclaimed Jesus was the Holy One of God in Luke 4:33-35:

*And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice, saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not.*

The demons did not see flesh and blood walking toward them; they saw Jehovah God.

In verse 4, Peter said to the lame man, “Look on us.” In verse 12, Peter said to the crowd, “Why look ye on us?” In verse 4 he was saying, “We will minister to you. We are here to help you.” In verse 12 he was saying, “We don’t want the attention from you. The glory belongs to God. This did not happen because of our power or because of our holiness.” (Sometimes the modern church gets this backwards.) Peter emphasized that the miracle occurred because of faith in the name of Jesus. “We didn’t do it; He did it!”

An old Hebrew saying about Jehovah says: “Himself is His Name and His Name is Himself.” Since Jesus Christ is Jehovah incarnate, this statement applies to Him. When you pray in Jesus’ name, you call everything that God is, everything that is about Him, and all the power that resides in God to bear on your prayer, your life, and your situation. When you speak the name of Jesus, you are interacting with the eternal God who created this world.

### **Acts 3:17-18**

“And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled” (Acts 3:17-18).

Peter realized that the Jews had rejected Christ through ignorance. Nevertheless, what they meant for evil, God used for good. Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies by His suffering and death.

In the Old Testament, a sin committed through ignorance required the priest to make atonement for the sinner. Numbers 15:28 states, “And the priest shall make an atonement for the soul that sinneth ignorantly, when he sinneth by ignorance before the LORD, to make an atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him.”

In the New Testament, all sin—including sins of ignorance—are covered by the blood of Jesus. Jesus has made atonement for each and every sin that you and I have committed. His atonement reaches to whoever in the world will receive it. Jesus has risen from the dead and is able to forgive every sin.

Luke recorded, “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). Jesus did not have the New Testament to preach from. When He wanted to share with His disciples who He was, what He was, from where He came, and what His plan was, He went back to the Old Testament. That’s what His disciples learned to do. So Peter reached back into Old Testament prophecy and wove passages together as he continued to preach and create a tapestry of who Jesus was.

### **Acts 3:19-21**

“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; and he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began” (3:19-21).

Repentance is a “turning from” sin. Conversion is “turning to” God. As an example, Paul cited the Thessalonians. “For they [Macedonians and Achaians] themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye [Thessalonians] turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (I Thessalonians 1:9).

It is not enough to turn away from sin. We must turn to God in daily consecration, having a lifestyle that pleases Him. The problem with twenty-first-century Christianity is that some have repented and turned away from sin but have not wholeheartedly turned to God. Consequently, they are dragged back to the beggarly elements of life. Instead of turning away from sin and leaving a religious vacuum, we must turn to God every day with our whole heart—with our priorities, our decisions, and our choices.

Peter’s use of “times of refreshing” and “times of restitution” harkens back to the Old Testament. “Times of refreshing” means revival, which the first coming of Christ brought with the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. Sins were not blotted out under the Law, only rolled ahead. Forgiveness of sin came with the first coming of Jesus and His death, burial, and resurrection.

A person does not get the times of refreshing until he or she receives the Holy Ghost. Isaiah said,

“For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little: 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 28:10-12).

“Times of restitution” looks to the future second coming of Christ. Regardless of the direction our culture and world may be headed – regardless of how anti-Christian and ungodly it becomes—a time is coming when God will right the wrong against His people. His everlasting kingdom will be restored “and all dominions shall serve and obey him.” The church will be the preeminent entity when the world is shaken by immense apostasy and also by enormous revival and restoration.

“And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him” (Daniel 7:27)

### **Acts 3:22-24**

“For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days” (Acts 3:22-24).

Peter quoted Deuteronomy 18:15-22 (about Moses), and pointed to Jesus Christ as the prophet “like unto Moses.” All the prophets, all of the Old Testament, the Tabernacle, the Temple, all of the feasts, and every sacrifice pointed to Him.

Peter later wrote these words about the prophets:

“Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into” (I Peter 1:10-12).

The prophets did not understand their own prophecies. Some of the prophets spoke of a suffering Savior. Some spoke of a servant who would give His life for others. Others spoke about a Messiah who would be reviled and spit upon. But others reached further in time and spoke of a Messiah who would come in glory and power. In the church age all of these prophecies converged and we have the Holy Ghost to lead and guide us into all truth.

The angels desire to look into the Holy Ghost experience. Every time we lift our hands in praise and begin to speak in other tongues, angels are attracted because they do not understand what is being said and neither have they experienced it.

### **Acts 3:25-26**

Peter concluded his sermon in Solomon’s Porch saying,

“Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (Acts 3:25-26).

Peter said to the Jews, “If anyone should get this, it should be you!” The Jews had the pedigree, the history, and the traditions. They sat in the Sanhedrin and in the synagogues. They should have been the ones to receive the blessings of God. But John recorded:

“He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:11-12).

The best defense of Christianity is a changed life (the lame man). The crowd did not run into the Temple to hear a doctrinal debate. They ran in to see the lame man who was leaping and praising God. The power of Jesus had changed his life forever.

The question for twenty-first-century Apostolics—who have been around this for a while and really know a lot of this, who have seen a lot and experienced a lot, who have heard way too many sermons, and who have only partially obeyed—is why should God have to raise up people who have never heard the name of Jesus to receive the Holy Ghost. If anyone gets this, it should be us that God uses to usher in end-time revival.

The lukewarm church of Laodicea said, “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.” Every Christian leans toward either Laodicea or the first-century church in Jerusalem. The first church in Jerusalem was not organized well enough to say that. They did not have social position or political connection. They did not have buildings or riches. The first-century church could only say, “Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I unto thee.”

The spirit of Laodicea says, “I don’t need you, preacher, to tell how to worship, how to set priorities, how to live my life. I’m rich and have need of nothing.”

The first-century church, which had no silver or gold, had the fire of the Holy Ghost. They turned the world upside down with the preaching of the gospel. Being filled with His Spirit and being used by God is greater than riches and fame. Let’s be first-century Christians.

## **What Have You Learned?**

Give short answers to the following questions.



1. In Acts 3:1-3, whom did Peter and John see as they went to the Temple? What was his physical condition? How long had he had this condition?

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2. If we do what we are supposed to do daily, what will God do?

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3. What is the emphasis in Acts 3 and 4?

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4. What did Jesus mean when He said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth"?

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5. What was Peter's reaction when the lame man asked for alms?

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6. What was the reaction of the lame man?

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7. What is the purpose of miracles? \_\_\_\_\_  
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8. When was the title "Holy One" used in reference to Jesus Christ?  
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9. Explain the meaning of the Hebrew axiom "Himself is His Name and His Name is Himself." \_\_\_\_\_  
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10. Since Peter did not have the New Testament, what source did he use in his preaching? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. What is the difference between *repentance* and *conversion*?  
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12. Did the Old Testament prophets understand their prophecies? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_  
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## Lesson 7

# Acts 4:1-31

### Recap

*In Acts 3, Peter and John created quite a stir in Jerusalem by healing a lame man on their way to prayer at the Temple. This happened on the way to a prayer meeting, not on the way from prayer meeting, because the early Christians prayed without ceasing.*

*To the lame man, Peter said, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6).*

*As a crowd gathered to see the former lame man "walking and leaping and praising God," Peter turned the Temple into a courtroom and laid out all the evidence for everybody to see. The crowd wondered how two ordinary fishermen could perform such a great miracle. Peter answered, "Only through the name of Jesus Christ." He said in Acts 3:16, "And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all."*

### Acts 4:1-4

Hearing about the commotion, the ruling council of the Jews quickly had the disciples arrested and held overnight to appear at a hearing.

*"And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put*

them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide. Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand” (Acts 4:1-4).

The Sadducees dominated the ruling council of the Jewish religion, the Sanhedrin. Unlike the Pharisees, Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. Consequently, Peter’s preaching about a resurrected Jesus and a lame man being healed through faith in His name was highly offensive. Nevertheless, even the disciples’ arrest couldn’t change the impact of this miracle—two thousand *more* people believed and were added to the church.

The early church had none of the “advantages” that we depend on today. They had no buildings. They had no denominational organization. They had no church staff. They had no technology. Most of their ministers had jail records and would probably have a hard time today joining some of our churches, let alone leading them. Nevertheless, the early church knew how to pray so that God’s hand would work.

We cannot have everything else progress and allow prayer to become a dying art. We cannot have everything else advance and have fervent Pentecostal worship pushed to the back seat and put in the archives. It has to be a praying church to get results.

In Acts 3 and 4, immediately after the Day of Pentecost, the emphasis is on the *name* of Jesus Christ. Modern Christendom has little emphasis on the name of Jesus. However, the early church baptized in His name. They prayed in His name. They worshiped His name and exalted His name. This is not a coincidence. A name is much more than just identification; it carries with it authority and power. The first concern of the first Christians was to give glory to His name.

### **Acts 4:5-7**

“And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?” (Acts 4:5-7).

The Sanhedrin consisted of at least seventy members, with the high priest as the leader. They had power under Rome to condemn a man, but not put him to death. Annas, the high priest, and Caiaphas, also a high priest and Annas's son-in-law, had both shared in the trial of Jesus, and had Him condemned by false witnesses in illegal proceedings held in the dead of night. (See Luke 3:1-3; John 18:13) They thought they had put an end to Jesus.

The Sanhedrin was compromised in so many ways. Annas filled it with his sons and relatives. Rome controlled it, changing high priests even before they died. It had condemned Jesus out of envy, with the voices of the priests being loudest at His trial before Pilate to sway the crowd. The Sadducees were the modernists of their day, and did not believe in angels, the spirit realm, or the resurrection. No wonder the ministry of Jesus shook their world—there had been “all of the above” ever since He arrived on earth.

Furthermore, Caiaphas had disqualified himself spiritually at the trial of Jesus from ever having any religious authority to lead the Sanhedrin, for he tore his clothes. Leviticus 21:10 states, “And he that is the high priest among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured, and that is consecrated to put on the garments, shall not uncover his head, nor rend his clothes.”

Mark recorded:

“But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death” (Mark 14:61-64).

*At this moment, the high priesthood passed to Jesus.* The writer of Hebrews stated:

“Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of

grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:14-16).

*By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?*

The Sanhedrin completely missed the point. A man who had been lame for thirty-eight years had just been miraculously healed. In fact, he was outside right in the Temple courtyard “walking, and leaping, and praising God.” However, the Sanhedrin wanted to punish the disciples who had had a part in him receiving his miracle. That’s spiritual blindness.

Peter and John should not have been surprised that they were hauled before the council. Jesus had prophesied:

“But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them . . . But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost” (Mark 13:9-11).

“And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved” (Matthew 10:22).

*The followers of Jesus in the first century were not persecuted for their doctrine or lifestyle. Instead, they were persecuted by the religious establishment because of their insistence on using His name. Does that sound familiar in the twenty-first century?*

## **Acts 4:8-12**

“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there

salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:8-12).

"Whom ye crucified . . . Whom God raised . . . even by Him." Peter's indictment is clear. He charged the Jewish leaders with killing Jesus Christ of Nazareth. He then reiterated that God had raised Jesus from the dead, and it was by Him that the lame man was walking and leaping and praising God. Peter was saying, "Jesus is alive and is here backing up the use of His name on the earth!"

Then Peter accused the Jewish leaders of setting aside the "cornerstone." According to the *Random House Kernerman Webster's College Dictionary*, a *cornerstone* is:

1. a stone uniting two masonry walls at an intersection.
2. a stone representing the nominal starting place in the construction of a monumental building, usually carved with the date.
3. something that is essential or basic.
4. the foundation on which something is constructed or developed.  
([thefreedictionary.com/cornerstone](http://thefreedictionary.com/cornerstone); accessed March 6, 2014.)

"I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation. The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm 118:21-24).

"This is the day" refers to the day of salvation, not just an ordinary day.

*Historia Scholastica* says that verses 22-23 describe a literal stone that the builders of the Temple discarded, until they found it perfectly fit for the most honorable place, coupling the sides of the walls together. This astonished the builders and Ezra wrote it in a psalm.

*Jesus is the chief cornerstone; He is the foundation of our salvation.*

A corner is where two things meet. In Jesus Christ, the cornerstone of the church, this includes Jews and Gentiles, bond and free, Law and grace, Heaven and earth, mercy and truth, and righteousness and peace. The psalmist said, "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psalm 85:10).

In Hebrew *head* (of the corner) is *rosh*, which means: “head, chief, leader, prince, captain, point, top, first rank, best, highest, supreme, summit, sum, beginning, commencement, foremost, principal, source, zenith, total, most excellent, head cornerstone.” Jesus is more than just a religious figure that the church gets together to talk about in a sappy, sentimental way. Jesus is the reason for the church existing. Jesus is the power over, under, and through the church. He is the head stone of the corner.

The *Moffat Translation* of Psalm 118:22, says, “The stone the builders cast aside is now the building’s strength and pride.”

When Peter said that Jesus was the stone that the builders had cast aside, the crowd knew immediately what he meant. The image of God as our Rock is all throughout the Old Testament, and it continued without missing a beat with Jesus in the New Testament. Consider:

“Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste” (Isaiah 28:16).

The crowd knew that Peter was zeroing in on the heart of the issue. Jesus is the chief. He is the top. He is the supreme. He is the ultimate. And He is the power behind what happened to the lame man.

Matthew recorded:

“Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?” (Matthew 21:42).

Jesus reached back to Psalm 118 and applied it to Himself.

Paul later wrote:

“For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (I Corinthians 1:22-24).



While some look for signs and others desire wisdom, the church preaches Jesus. He is a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks, but to those in the church, He is the power of God and the wisdom of God. When we seek Jesus, we get all power and wisdom of God packaged together in the name of Jesus, who is the head of the corner. Concerning this, Paul wrote:

“And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Ephesians 2:20).

When you look at the church, the important feature is not the pastor, the building, the denomination, nor the strategy. The only saving grace of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the head stone of the corner. To Him belongs all the glory and praise.

Peter later wrote two epistles. In his first one, he said:

“Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy” (I Peter 2:6-10).

The world in the twenty-first century gets offended by Christianity, by what Jesus taught, and by what the Scriptures say. Jesus said it would happen. He said He would become a rock of offense and a stumbling stone.

That’s the world. The world gets offended at Jesus. The world gets offended at His teaching and morality. They want to simplify Jesus and take only the quotes that they like. But Jesus, who is the Prince of Peace, said He did not come to bring peace but the sword and that a man’s enemies will be they of his own household. Jesus wants real unity and He came to call out a people for His name. He is more concerned about your eternal destiny than your temporal comfort.

Why would Jesus call anyone out of the world? Why would He choose a church and require it to live differently from the world? Peter's answer is the church "should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."

The church is not a collection of nice artwork to put in glass cases in an ecclesiastical museum. Instead, it is an emergency ward for those recovering from every stage of sin. The mission of the church is to save people from their sins. In times past, we were in darkness, but now we walk in light so that we can show forth the glory of God.

In time past, we were in darkness; now we walk in light. In time past, we lived in sin, but now we live in righteousness. In time past, we were not a people, but now we are His people. In time past, we had not obtained mercy, but today we have mercy. And all of this is because of the name of Jesus. That is how important His name is.

In the beginning of this study, we looked at Matthew 18:

"And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:16-18).

Peter's revelation that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, is the rock upon which the church is built. Jesus is our firm foundation of salvation. That is why we baptize in His name. That is why Acts 4:12 states, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." No other name can do for you what His name can.

The Sanhedrin commanded the disciples not to teach or preach at all in the name of Jesus, *because the name means the person*. The name of the Lord Jesus Christ was not merely a theory or a doctrine or a theological argument in the early church. The name was a *person* who had all *power* because He had risen from the dead.

That's why we worship the *name* and sing about the *name* and pray for healing in the *name* and preach in the *name* and baptize in the *name* and why the

devil fears the *name*. That is why Paul wrote to the church in Colosse, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Colossians 3:17). His name is above all names. His name embodies His person and contains His authority.

### **Acts 4:13-14**

We sometimes think that our class, our building, or our strategies will impress people. However, in the early church, it was boldness:

“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it” (Acts 4:13-14).

It was readily clear to the Sanhedrin that Peter and James were uneducated Galileans. They were not schooled in the most advanced rabbinical seminary. They were not of a priestly lineage. Nevertheless, they had boldness—for they had been with Jesus.

The Sanhedrin had a real dilemma. They could not argue with the results of the message the disciples were preaching. The changed life of the lame man spoke loud and clear. (Even today, the most effective testimony is that of a changed life. Take time in class to share several testimonies.)

The miracle did not happen because of Peter and John or because of a denomination or because of oratorical skills, but because they had been with Jesus. His Spirit gave them power to be witnesses of Him.

### **Acts 4:15-18**

“But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in

this name. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:15-18).

Once again, the concern of the Sanhedrin was to silence the name. (The name is the person and the person is the name. Therefore, if the person has all power, then the name has all power.) The Jewish elders were not seeking for truth, but simply for a way to silence the truth.

The more the council tried to silence the preaching about the name of Jesus, the more the early church proclaimed it.

### **Acts 4:19-22**

As in the early church, silencing the name is still the agenda of the devil and all of Hell. What do you do when the devil threatens you and tries to keep you silent about the name?

"But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done. For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed" (Acts 4:19-22).

Because they had no real case to offer, the council could only threaten the men and let them go. After all, when you have a living miracle before you, as well as an approving public around you, you must be careful.

The disciples were not trying to start a fight or argument. They were simply doing what God had commanded. They were simply preaching the gospel. For them, obedience to the council was not an option. They would obey God. They would not stop preaching nor stop teaching nor stop praying nor stop worshipping nor stop lifting up the name of Jesus.

### **Acts 4:23-28**

“And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done” (Acts 4:23-28).

The church met to pray in order to defeat the enemy and began to intercede with the words of Scripture in Psalm 2. Too often today, believers gather for prayer as though attending a concert or a party. There is little sense of urgency and danger because most of us are comfortable in our Christian walk. If more of God’s people were witnessing for Christ in daily life, there would be more urgency, more passion, more blessing, and more power when the church meets for prayer.

The power of God descends when the church prays. When the church prays, Hell shakes. When the church prays, the church also shakes.

### **Acts 4:29-31**

“And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:29-31).

The early church did not pray for their circumstances to be changed. Instead, they asked God to empower and embolden them to make the best use of their circumstances in order to bring glory to His name.

The same people who were filled with the Holy Ghost in Acts 2 were filled again in Acts 4—because the church *prayed* without ceasing.

## What Have You Learned?

Give short answers to the following questions.

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2. What was the Sanhedrin?

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3. What is the emphasis of Acts 3 and 4?

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4. How did Caiaphas disqualify himself from being high priest?

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5. Were Peter and John surprised by their arrest? Why or why not?

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6. Quote Acts 4:12.

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7. What passage of Scripture did Peter quote in his reply to the Sanhedrin?

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8. What is a cornerstone?

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9. Quote Ephesians 2:20.

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10. Quote Colossians 3:17.

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11. How did the Sanhedrin describe Peter and John?

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12. What did the Sanhedrin command Peter and John to do?

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13. What was Peter and John's response to the orders from the Sanhedrin?

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14. What psalm was used by the early church following Peter and John's release?

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15. For what did the early church pray?

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## Lesson 8

# Acts 4:32-5:16

### Recap

*In Acts 3-4, immediately after the Day of Pentecost, the emphasis was on the name of Jesus Christ. This is not a coincidence. A name is much more than just identification; it carries with it authority and power. The first concern of the first Christians was to give glory to His name. This is evident throughout the third and fourth chapters of Acts:*

- *Healing of the lame man: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6). Disease has to bow at the name of Jesus.*
- *Peter's explanation of the healing of the lame man: "And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know" (Acts 3:16). The apostles were very clear that the healing did not occur because of their training or expertise. It happened because of the power of the name of Jesus.*
- *The Sanhedrin's question to the apostles: "By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?" (Acts 4:7). The Sanhedrin realized that the power is in the name. They knew that the power is in the name and the name is in the power.*
- *Peter's response to the Sanhedrin: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).*
- *The Sanhedrin's verdict to the apostles: "[They] commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:18). Some in the Christian world would like to limit our exposure, limit our excitement, and limit our enthusiasm for the name of Jesus.*
- *The prayer of the apostles: "That signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus" (Acts 4:30). The early church had revival because the believers emphasized the name of Jesus and because they had unity.*

## **Acts 4:32-37**

“And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 4:32-37).

This is not man-made “communism,” neither is it the many who would work to support the few who wouldn’t work, as we sometimes see today. This is a family—a body, a church—that is so sold out to the Great Commission that they put the church’s message and ministry first in every part of their lives, including their possessions. These are freewill offerings like the ones that were given for the building of the Tabernacle and Temple—and Barnabas led the way. The spirit of giving caught on among the believers, and they sold their belongings and brought the money to the apostles to be used for the sake of the gospel.

The Lord knew that in AD 70, the Romans would destroy the city of Jerusalem and the people would scatter. Everyone would lose everything . . . except those who followed Barnabas’s example and gave it to the church beforehand.

Our pioneers used to teach us that when you invest in the kingdom of God you are actually investing in the next world. You are investing in an inheritance that is incorruptible and undefiled.

## **Acts 5:1-11**

The devil hates and fears unity. He has tried persecuting the church from without, and that hasn’t stopped it. Actually, persecution from without

strengthens the church. So now in Acts 5, he tried corruption from within. The enemy within the church is always more deadly than the enemy without.

“But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles’ feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things” (Acts 5:1-11).

The name Ananias means “gracious,” but he presumed on the grace of God. Sapphira’s name means “beautiful,” but her heart was ugly with secret sin.

Please note that the Lord judges sin severely at the beginning of each new covenant He makes with His people as a warning to them:

- Just after the Tabernacle was finished, God killed Nadab and Abihu for trying to offer “strange fire” before the Lord (Leviticus 10)
- Just after Israel was banished to the wilderness for forty years, God had a man killed for working on the Sabbath day (Numbers 15)
- Just after Israel entered the Promised Land, God had Achan killed for taking forbidden spoils from the city of Jericho (Joshua 7).

*God is serious about His covenants and commandments.*

Ananias and Sapphira's sin was not having land or possessions nor refusing to give nor not giving the entire amount. Their sin was lying to the Holy Ghost, giving a false outward impression to the church in hopes that the inward reality wouldn't be detected. This is hypocrisy.

It was pride that transformed Lucifer into Satan (Isaiah 14). It was pride ("Ye shall be as God!") that caused Adam and Eve to sin (Genesis 3). Pride opens the door to every other sin, for once we are more concerned with our outward reputation than our inward character, there is no end to the things we will do to make ourselves "look good" before others. God's people are not so concerned about their reputation but are concerned that no barriers exist when they kneel before a just and merciful God.

God is jealous over His church, for it was purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28). The church is "the pillar and ground of the truth" (I Timothy 3:15), while Satan is "a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44). The devil will do anything he can to infiltrate the truth with a lie in order to hinder and harass God's precious possession. Had Peter not received a word of knowledge, Ananias and Sapphira might have become influential people in the church, and the devil could have worked through them on the inside.

Their sin was the sin of presumption. The sin of presumption is assuming that we can do anything we want and that God will overlook it, that He will be merciful to us.

It is the same sin that Jesus conquered in the wilderness:

"And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Matthew 4:6-7).

The devil was quoting Scripture. He comes in a garment that looks so spiritual, that looks so concerned, that looks so genuine. He comes in a garment that looks as if he really has a good motive, that he says cruel, hurtful things only because he wants to get to the truth.

The devil doesn't want to get to the truth. He hates the truth. He is the father of lies. He will do anything he can to defeat truth, such as twisting the Scripture as he did to tempt Jesus.

Ananias and Sapphira were presumptuous in thinking they could appear to be in unity with the other givers in the church. They wanted to appear to be generous. God judged them for their hypocrisy.

"For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged" (I Corinthians 11:31).

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians makes it clear that we need to judge ourselves to avoid the judgment of God. We need to examine our own lives in view of what the Bible teaches, repent of any shortcomings, and live a life of holiness.

"He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:28-31).

If people under the Old Testament covenant were convicted by the testimony of two or three witnesses and stoned for violating the Law, the punishment for those who dishonor the blood of the New Covenant and despise the spirit of grace will be much more severe. That is why the writer of Hebrews stated, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31). In the New Testament, those that treat the blood of Christ, His spirit of grace, His living Word, His saving name, and His glorious power casually are in danger of much worse punishment than those that were stoned to death in the Old Testament.

Some Christians like to portray God as a loving, gentle "grandfather" who is too naïve, too senile, too hard of hearing, and too dim-sighted to be too concerned about sins and transgressions. Consequently, they live any way they want during the week and expect God to overlook their shortcomings if they will

come to church on Sunday and go through their little praise routine and do lip service to holiness.

They forget that “our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29) “taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (II Thessalonians 1:8). Because they forget, they treat church, God, commitment, and holiness so casually. However, God created this universe, runs it, and will judge it, because “our God is a consuming fire.”

Ananias and Sapphira’s sin was not in robbing God of money, but in lying to the Holy Spirit and thus robbing God of glory. They pretended to be in unity with the church. They pretended to have the same heartbeat. They pretended to agree with the doctrine and convictions. They pretended to submit to leadership. They pretended to go along with the strategies and plans. But it was a farce—a fraud, a fake. Their pretending robbed God of His glory.

Consequently, Peter demanded, “How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?” (Acts 5:9). Modern vernacular would ask, “How can you be so stupid as to think you can pretend to do anything the Lord would not know about?”

The same question can be asked today. Are you doing anything that you would not want someone else to know about? Do you have attitudes and thoughts you are trying to hide from God? Are you saying things that you would not want someone else to hear? Who is it that you have “agreed together” with to do something that both of you know is against the Word of God? What a dangerous place to live.

The fall into sin does not happen overnight. Satan knows that the wages of sin is death, but his greatest desire is that we not receive the immediate consequences of our sin. Why? Because he knows the Bible.

“Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily,  
therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil”  
(Ecclesiastes 8:11).

If you find yourself in a habitual pattern of sin but you are not experiencing any consequences, fall on your knees immediately and repent. Why? Because Satan is setting you up for a fall.

At this point, we move from “great power” and “great grace” (Acts 4:33) to “great fear” (Acts 5:11), which fell on the church and the city. The true grace of God always brings the true fear of God.

“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:28-29).

If you have true grace, then you will have a holy fear of God. Many sins are in the Bible besides adultery, fornication, and murder. One of the sins is lying and pretending to be in unity with the church. This was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. This was the sin God judged severely at the beginning of the church age.

It is dangerous to move outside the unity of the body of Christ and outside of submission to leadership. What a dangerous place to live. It’s dangerous to have conversations about the church and its leaders, about what’s good and not so good.

The most damaging people to the church are not the rank sinners or those trying to hinder the progress of the church through politics or philosophies. The ones most harmful to the church are those inside the church who conspire together to sow discord and disunity through their mouth, tongue, mind, and criticism.

## **Acts 5:12-16**

“And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon’s porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.) Inasmuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one” (Acts 5:12-16).

Everyone would like to have a revival where everyone is healed and filled with the Holy Spirit. However, to have those results demands that we have what came earlier: reverence for the ministry.

Verse 13 states, “And of the rest durst no man join himself to them [apostles]; but the people magnified them.” This verse is not saying that the community was afraid to join the church, since verse 14 tells us exactly the opposite. It states that as the believers looked on their leadership with less familiarity and more reverence and “magnified” the office God had given them, revival broke out again. It was not that the city people were afraid to come into the church. It was that the believers held the apostles in higher regard. Ministry in the church is a sacred calling and deserves great respect.

The late Billy Cole, founding missionary of the United Pentecostal Church of Thailand, said, “I can only minister to you to the degree that you respect me.”

“For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins. And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron” (Hebrews 5:1-4).

If you want to loose a supernatural move of God in the church, then hold in high esteem the ministries that God has set in the church.

## What Have You Learned?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. What was the concern of the first Christians?

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2. Why did the early Christians sell their possessions and bring the money to the apostles? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. What happened in AD 70?

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4. What does the devil fear and hate? Why?

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5. What did Ananias and Sapphira do?

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6. What judgment fell on Ananias and Sapphira? Why?

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7. In Acts 5:1-11, Peter manifested which gift of the Spirit?

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8. What is the sin of presumption?

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9. Why will judgment on those who dishonor the blood of the New Covenant be more severe than those who were under the old covenant?

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10. Ananias and Sapphira's pretending robbed God of what? Why?

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11. Why did "great fear" fall on the church?

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12. Why does the ministry deserve great respect?

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13. What does great respect for the ministry bring? Why?

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14. In your opinion, what is the most important or outstanding part of the story of Ananias and Sapphira? Why?

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## Lesson 9

# Acts 5:17-6:7

### Recap

*“And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:32-33).*

*The first-century church was so sold out to the Great Commission that the believers put the church’s message and ministry first in every part of their lives: their schedules, their finances, their priorities, and their possessions.*

*The devil hates and fears that kind of unity. He has tried to persecute the church from without and that hasn’t stopped it. In fact, church history bears witness that when external pressures assail the church, the church survives and thrives. So in Acts 5 the devil tried another tactic—to corrupt the church from within through Ananias and Sapphira. He knows an enemy inside the church is always more deadly than the enemy without.*

*Ananias and Sapphira’s sin was lying to the Holy Ghost, giving a false outward impression of “unity” with the rest of the church in hopes that their private, inward reality wouldn’t be detected. They wanted the reputation of being cooperative, committed, and generous while retaining a large portion for themselves. However, Peter asked, “How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?” (Acts 5:9).*

*God did not have a problem with Ananias and Sapphira owning property. He didn’t even have a problem with them selling the property and keeping some of the proceeds for themselves. His problem was their hypocrisy, their pretending to be in unity*

*with the rest of the church, their agreeing together to deceive. They were lying to the Holy Ghost.*

*Who is it that you have “agreed together” with to do something that both of you know is against the Word of God? What a dangerous place to live. It doesn’t have to be murder or adultery. It could simply be gossiping, criticizing, or backbiting.*

*The fall into sin does not happen overnight. Satan knows that the wages of sin is death, but his greatest desire is that we not receive the immediate consequences of our sin. He would prefer that life gets better for us after we sin. Why? Because he knows the Bible.*

*“Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Ecclesiastes 8:11).*

*If you find yourself in a habitual pattern of sin, but you are not experiencing any consequences, fall on your knees immediately and repent. Why? Because Satan is setting you up for a fall.*

*Note Acts 5:11: “And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.” At this point, we move from “great power” and “great grace” (Acts 4:33) to “great fear” (Acts 5:11), which fell on the church and the city. We do a disservice to fear when we simply translate it as “reverence.” It actually means “overwhelming, in-awe reverence of what God is doing.” The true grace of God always brings the true fear of God.*

*“And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon’s porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.) Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one” (Acts 5:12-16).*

*Verse 13 states, “And of the rest durst no man join himself to them [apostles]; but the people magnified them.” This verse is not saying that the community was afraid to join the church, since verse 14 tells us exactly the opposite. It states, “And believers were the more added to the Lord.” In other words, as the believers looked on their leadership with less familiarity and more reverence and “magnified” the office God had given them, revival broke out again.*

*The church grew because of the incredible respect shown to the leaders. If we want to be a Book-of-Acts church, if we want to loose a supernatural move of God, then we need to hold in very high esteem the ministries that God has set in the church. This is the Book-of-Acts pattern. If we want to have the power of the Book of Acts and if we want to have the grace of the Book of Acts, then we need to have the godly fear of the Book of Acts. We need to honor those whom God has placed in the leadership of the church.*

*It was not that the city people were afraid to come into the church. It was that the believers held the apostles in higher esteem. The church respected Peter so much that they prayed for him. They interceded for him when he was in jail. They held him in high honor because of the position God had given him. As respect for the apostles grew, people laid the sick alongside the road in hopes that Peter's shadow might overshadow them.*

*The twenty-first-century church wants apostolic power, but not necessarily apostolic authority. When we get our structure right, then God will manifest His power.*

*If you want to loose a supernatural move of God in the church, then hold in high esteem the ministries that God has set in the church!*

## **Acts 5:17-25**

“Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within. Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow. Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye

put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people” (Acts 5:17-25).

The miracles enraged the high priest and the Sadducees who “laid their hands on the apostles.” This was not the first time the disciples were called before the council. This time, however, they were put in the common prison.

The prison bars, however, could not hold the apostles. An angel of the Lord came at night and opened the prison doors. He then instructed the apostles to return to the Temple and preach the words of life.

Listen to what the Holy Spirit was saying to the leaders of the New Testament church: It doesn’t matter what opposition you get. It doesn’t matter what religion is upset. It doesn’t matter what persecution you may experience. It doesn’t matter that your circumstances may go backward when you are in the will of God and preaching His Word. You get up, you go back, you pick up where you left off, and you begin teaching and preaching again. Do not let circumstances, opposition, persecution, or anything else deter you from preaching the gospel.

The council sent soldiers to retrieve the prisoners. They came back empty handed, for the prisoners were gone. Nevertheless, the prison remained locked and sentries guarded the doors. Shortly thereafter, someone reported that the men whom the high priest had arrested were in the Temple teaching the people.

In the twenty-first century, we have watched institution after institution rise up and then crumble because of doing something unethical. Consequently, I do not have a lot of confidence in institutions. However, I do have utmost confidence in the church of the living God. Time and time again, people like the members of the Sanhedrin have tried to push it down and do away with it. However, no matter how you try to push the church down, it keeps rising up some place else. No matter how you try to persecute it, it sidesteps the persecution and keeps on preaching.

We have brothers and sisters in many parts of the world who are not free to proclaim the gospel, but they do it anyway. They are not free to baptize in Jesus’ name, but they do it anyway. They are not free to gather for large evangelistic meetings, but they meet in small groups and preach the gospel anyway. Why do they do it? Because Hell cannot prevail against the church.

Just imagine the astonishment of the members of the Sanhedrin when they heard this report. Here they were trying to stop the miracles, but their actions against the apostles only multiplied them.

### **Acts 5:26-33**

“Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him. When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them” (Acts 5:26-33).

The miracles wrought by the hands of the disciples demonstrated the power of God. The divine signs and wonders made the disciples popular and caused the priests to fear the people. Consequently, they had the soldiers to bring the apostles before them “without violence,” lest the crowd arose against the council.

The council accused the disciples of filling Jerusalem with the name of Jesus and their preaching of the death, burial, and resurrection. In doing so, the high priest remembered that just weeks before as Jesus stood before Pilate, the people shouted, “His blood be on us, and on our children” (Matthew 27:25). The high priest recognized that their request was coming to pass. Hence, he accused the disciples of “bringing this man’s blood upon us.”

When you look at the first-century revival, you will notice several things. The disciples exalted the name of Jesus. They spread the doctrine of Jesus. They proclaimed the power of His blood. Consequently, the council did not like that revival had come to Jerusalem.

The disciples declared, "Him [Jesus] hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." How does God give repentance? Isn't repenting something that we do? Yes, we do confess and turn from our sins. Remember, however, you can repent only if God allows you to feel your need of it.

God gives repentance when He allows you to feel conviction. When this happens, you should lift your hands and thank God. Conviction does not always feel good. It is not always comfortable. Sometimes you may leave a service feeling as though you were beat up by the Word of God. However, without conviction we would not feel the need to repent. We need to repent whenever we violate the will and Word of God.

The council members were educated, ordained, and approved, and yet they had no ministry of power. The apostles were ordinary men, yet God's power was working in their lives. In demanding the disciples to quit preaching Jesus, the council was trying desperately to protect themselves and their dead traditions, while the apostles were risking their lives to share the living Word of God. The disciples knew what to do. If there's tension between obeying God and men, *obey God*.

### **Acts 5:34-39**

"Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; and said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed. And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God" (Acts 5:34-39).



Gamaliel, a Pharisee, commanded such high respect that the Sadducee-dominated Sanhedrin listened to his advice. His perspective was that men and their movements come and go, so if the situation was simply left alone, it would pass. He didn't realize that this movement was not of men, but of God. He also didn't realize that God was using him and his words to protect the church.

Gamaliel was actually helping the church. He was protecting the church and he wasn't even a member. Gamaliel illustrated that if God decides to fight for you, it doesn't matter who fights against you. If God decides to bless you, it doesn't matter who curses you. If God decides to lock His angels around you and say, "You can't touch them," it doesn't matter who criticizes or mocks you.

Paul voiced this principle when he stated, "For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth" (II Corinthians 13:8). The more the early church was persecuted, the more it flourished.

### **Acts 5:40-42**

*"And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Acts 5:40-42).*

*"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matthew 5:10-12).*

The council would not beat the disciples in public for fear of the people. Nevertheless, the Sanhedrin beat the disciples in private and commanded that they should not preach in the name of Jesus. The first-century religious leaders who were not Christians knew that the power was in the name of Jesus. The power was not in a group of people getting together and talking about the cross or having a theological discussion. The power was in the name of Jesus.

Every time people were baptized in the first-century church, they were baptized in Jesus' name. Imagine over three thousand people being baptized on the Day of Pentecost. Every time someone was immersed, he or she was buried in the name of Jesus. The members of the council knew if they were ever to stop the movement that was sweeping Jerusalem, they would have to stop the disciples from preaching and baptizing in the name of Jesus.

Bloody and broken, the disciples limped away from the council rejoicing in that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus. Jesus' words on the mountain echoed in their ears: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven" (See Matthew 5:10-12.)

Instead of refraining from preaching in the name of Jesus, they did it *daily* in the Temple and from house to house. The Temple was not the church, as the early believers did not have a church building. Nevertheless, they met daily and daily proclaimed the gospel.

## **Acts 6:1-7**

"And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:1-7).

In Acts 6, the church numbered around five thousand believers. The twelve disciples were trying to meet the needs of the individuals, but the needs overwhelmed them. The Grecians—Greek-speaking Jews from other nations—complained that the Grecian widows were not having their needs met. Therefore, the Twelve called a multitude of the disciples together.

The Twelve realized that their priority should be prayer and the ministry of the Word, not serving tables and caring for temporal matters. That's why they said, "It not reason"—or, "It's not fitting"—that they should wait on tables. Spiritual leaders in the church must make the ministry of the Word and prayer a priority. It is not that they are "too good" to serve tables; it's that serving tables would be a distraction to their priority.

This is not to suggest that serving tables is a menial task, because every ministry in the church is important. In fact, one of the men appointed here (Stephen) became the catalyst for the next phase of revival in the Book of Acts. This is simply a matter of priorities; the apostles were doing jobs that others could do just as well. Dwight Moody taught that it was better to put ten men to work than to try to do the work of ten men.

*Church problems give us an opportunity to exercise our faith, not only faith in the Lord, but also faith in our leaders and in each other.*

Spiritually immature people in the church have many more needs (and are much more likely to feel "neglected") than established saints.

The Twelve tasked the multitude of disciples to choose six men to be deacons and oversee the material needs of the Christian community. The qualifications for a deacon—any ministry position within the church: (1) honest, (2) wise, (3) full of the Holy Ghost.

The early church was not afraid to adjust their structure in order to make room for ministry. It is tragic when churches actually destroy ministry and hinder growth because they refuse to modify their structure. The apostles were not afraid to share their authority and ministry with others, because they realized that authority and ministry come from God.

Verse 4 gives a pastor's basic job description: *"But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word."* If you truly desire to have an apostolic church, you need to do anything you can possibly do to make this happen.

Look at the list of deacons (“servants”) appointed: Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas. These are all Greek names. This teaches us two lessons:

1. The Hebrew part of the church did not hold on to any idea of “seniority” or “superiority,” but let the most qualified people serve.
2. If you can identify a problem in the church, or have a burden for something to be done, God wants to use you to fix it.

And what is the result of the apostles sharing ministry?

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

## What Have You Learned?

Give short answers to the following questions

1. Why did the Sanhedrin lay hands on the apostles?

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2. By the angelic release of the apostles from prison, what message was God sending to the church leaders?

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3. After being released from prison, where did the disciples go? What did they do?

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4. What did the Sanhedrin do in response to the disciples disobeying its command?

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5. What did the miracles wrought by the disciples demonstrate?

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6. Why did the soldiers bring the apostles to the Sanhedrin “without violence”?

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7. What accusations did the council bring against the disciples?

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8. How does God grant repentance?

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9. Who was Gamaliel? What advice did he give the council?

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10. Explain Paul's statement in II Corinthians 13:8: "For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth."

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11. Where did the disciples meet following their release from the Sanhedrin?

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12. Who were the Grecians?

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13. What was the Grecians' complaint?

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14. How did the disciples solve the problem?

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## Lesson 10

# Acts 6:8-7:53

### Recap

*“Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:3-7).*

Chapter 6 is one of the pivotal moments in the Book of Acts when the church experienced “growing pains.” The disciples realized their first priority should be prayer and the Word of God. When the Word increases, the church increases. It is here that the leaders appointed the first seven “deacons” to shoulder some of the responsibility of ministry – because the church cannot grow effectively if we expect those who lead us and preach to us to handle many other ministry responsibilities also. These seven men were not specially gifted, nor were they politically empowered – in fact, the Greek word *diakonos* simply means “a servant.”

The twenty-first-century believers usually think of a deacon as one who fills an official position in the church. Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas were appointed to serve the material needs of the congregation – to “serve tables” (Acts 6:2). The message was that the church needed more servants, not more leaders. The names of the deacons indicate they were Grecian Jews and had a vested interest in the care of the Grecian widows.

*This passage is also pivotal because it gives us the background for what happens next in Acts – two of these laymen, Stephen and Philip, are about to be mightily used by God to preach the gospel, to work miracles, and to propel the church forward. The Book-of-Acts pattern shows us that every member of the church is to be anointed for ministry.*

## **Acts 6:8-15**

“And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, and set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel” (Acts 6:8-15).

The emphasis in Stephen’s life is on *fullness*: he was full of the Holy Spirit, full of wisdom, full of faith, and full of power. In Scripture, to be “full of” means “to be controlled by.” Stephen was a God-controlled man who had a huge impact on his church – and he was *not* one of the leaders.

It is God’s will for every believer to be full of the Holy Ghost – controlled by the Spirit of God – and to affect not only the church but also the world.

Jews who had returned from many nations resided in Jerusalem in their own “quarters,” and some of these ethnic groups had their own synagogues. Remember that going to the synagogue didn’t mean going to church – the synagogues were *opposed* to the church. They didn’t want to hear the message of a new covenant that would take the place of their own religion, which had now become little more than a ritual. Because of Stephen’s powerful testimony, some of his own countrymen, Grecian Jews, viciously opposed him, and set up false



witnesses against him. Nevertheless, God used even these circumstances to build His church.

The opposition should not have surprised Stephen and the disciples. Jesus said:

“If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name’s sake, because they know not him that sent me” (John 15:18-21).

If you think you can serve God and witness for Him in an ungodly culture and not have opposition, then you are sadly mistaken—even partly delusional. In a culture without absolutes, nothing works absolutely. Such a culture arrays itself against the Scriptures, which are full of absolutes. Nevertheless, you can count on one absolute: If you live for God and witness for Him, you will face opposition and persecution. Count on it. That is the pattern of the early church. It is how our Lord Jesus Christ experienced it.

The men whom the Sanhedrin had suborned lied against Stephen. The members of the council considered the statements offensive to the Temple and their traditions. The lies inflamed the men. They hated Stephen because he preached Jesus.

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

Acts 7 contains Stephen’s response to the Jewish council; it is the longest address in the Book of Acts. In it he reviewed some of the highlights of Israel’s history to show them that their forefathers at first rejected some of the very men they now claimed to revere.

- Each of the people mentioned is a *type of Christ* in some way.
- Most were *rejected* by Israel the first time they appeared to them.
- Most were then *exalted* by God and eventually accepted by Israel.

- Each one reveals Israel's failure to listen to one *sent from God*.
- The point is the significance of "the second time."

### **Acts 7:1-8: Abraham**

"Then said the high priest, Are these things so? And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell. And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child. And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years. And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place. And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs" (Acts 7:1-8).

The *first time*, Abram's father Terah set out for Canaan, but got only as far as Haran and decided to live there until he died (Genesis 11:31). Abram fell short of God's promise because he did not go all the way. The *second time*, God spoke His great covenant to Abram and Abram set out for a land that he had never seen (Genesis 12:1-3).

Audaciously God promised to give Abram a land that he had not seen or walked on. God extended the promise to Abram's seed when he was childless.

### **Acts 7:9-16: Joseph**

"And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him, and delivered him out of all his afflictions, and

gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh. Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls. So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers, and were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem" (Acts 7:9-16).

The *first time*, Joseph was rejected by his brethren, betrayed for twenty pieces of silver, and falsely accused by Potiphar's wife. "But God was with him." The *second time*, Joseph was exalted to the throne of Egypt, was given a name to which every knee bowed, and was accepted by his brethren. Jerome, a fourth century church historian, said that Joseph's Egyptian name, "Zaphnathpaaneah," means "Savior of the World." (Don't Joseph's experiences sound like Jesus'?)

### **Acts 7:17-36: Moses**

"But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, till another king arose, which knew not Joseph. The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live. In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months: and when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds. And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: for he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not. And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye

wrong one to another? But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday? Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons. And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush. When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him, saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold. Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground. I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt. This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush. He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years" (Acts 7:17-36).

The *first time*, Moses narrowly escaped being slain with all the other male children at the time of his birth. His family was then protected in Egypt until he grew. However, when he tried to help his fellow Israelites, he was rejected by those who asked, "Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?" The *second time*, Moses appeared to his brethren with the name he received at the burning bush, "I Am That I Am," and he brought them out of Egypt with miracles, signs, and wonders.

Now Stephen began to show how everything under the Old Covenant—including their beloved Tabernacle and Temple—actually pointed to the fact that God was eventually going to do something *greater*.

"And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

## **Acts 7:37-50**

“This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us: to whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt, saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness? Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon. Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen. Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David; who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built him an house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?” (Acts 7:37-50).

Moses prophesied that God would raise up another prophet like unto himself, but the Israelites failed to listen to the voice of Moses and pursued the gods of Canaan.

God gave Israel the Tabernacle in the wilderness, which testified of His presence among them. Solomon fulfilled David’s dream and built a Temple for God. Although not as grand as Solomon’s, Herod’s Temple of Stephen’s day was a landmark that embodied Israel’s worship, history, and glory. Unfortunately, Israel forgot that the Temple was not designed or built for religious grandeur, national pride, or self-exaltation. It was built only for the glory of God.

In summary:

- Israel didn't listen to Moses—even after he delivered them, they still longed for Egypt in their hearts, and wanted to go back.
- Israel didn't listen to Aaron—they made a golden calf, and gave that dead idol the credit for the blessings God had given.
- Israel didn't listen to the prophets—they began to worship and serve the false gods of the heathen nations all around them.
- And Israel missed the point that the Tabernacle, the Temple, the priesthood, the feast days, the Law, and all the sacrifices were actually just “rehearsals” pointing ahead to something much greater—because God could never be contained in a building.

## Acts 7:51-53

“Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it” (Acts 7:51-53).

Stephen told the council that although they may be circumcised in *body*, they were uncircumcised in *heart*. Although they were *given* the covenant, they were living *outside* the covenant. Although they prided themselves on being *Jews*, spiritually they were like *Gentiles*.

Paul instructed the church not to quench the Spirit. One of the tragedies of the twenty-first-century church is that we want the Spirit to conform to our rituals and routines. God will not be confined to our little boxes or schedules. Those that really want God must hunger and thirst after righteousness.

The devil really has a problem with anyone who points to Jesus. Abraham pointed to Jesus. Joseph pointed to Jesus. Moses pointed to Jesus. The prophets pointed to Jesus. The devil has a grudge against anyone whose life and message points to Jesus Christ. He doesn't care if you point to a weak, watered-down version of Christianity. But he does get violently upset with men and women who exalt Jesus in all of His glory and splendor.

For the second time in a matter of weeks, the religious leaders heard accusations that they had killed the Just One of Israel.

The *first time*, Israel resisted, persecuted, and killed all of the prophets who pointed the way to the coming of the “Just One” –the same way they resisted, persecuted, and killed Jesus who fulfilled all their prophecies. *Jesus was rejected the first time*. But the *second time*, Jesus will not be coming to earth as a baby. He will be returning as King of kings and Lord of lords.

“And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph’s kindred was made known unto Pharaoh” (Acts 7:13).

When Jesus comes back as the King of kings, the Jews will ask Him, “What are these wounds in thine hands? Then He shall answer, “Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends” (Zechariah 13:6). He’s not coming back to be nailed to a cross.

When Jesus comes back the second time, He’s returning in power and glory to take authority over all the nations of the earth. John wrote:

“Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:7-8).

Jesus is not coming back the second time to be beat up and abused. Understanding what Stephen was saying, the writer of Hebrews wrote:

“So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Hebrews 9:28).

How ironic that the people who should have been *first* to accept Jesus will actually be the *last* to accept Him. The Jews had all of God’s blessings to testify to them, and they missed it.

What about *you*? The Jews had only the Old Testament and missed it. Stephen preached, “Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and

have not kept it” (Acts 7:53). We have both the Old Testament and the New Testament to testify against us. Peter wrote:

“Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into” (I Peter 1:10-12).

Jesus is a polarizing figure. If He steps into your peripheral vision, into your life, you immediately have to make a decision. Jesus is who He said He was and you owe Him your allegiance and life. Or He means nothing to you and you walk away unchanged. Nevertheless, Jesus is coming back a second time in all of His glory.

## What Have You Learned?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. Why is Acts 6 a pivotal time in early church history?

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2. Describe Stephen’s characteristics as cited in Acts 6:8.

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3. What does “full of the Holy Ghost” mean?

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4. Who were the "Grecians"?

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5. What was the Sanhedrin?

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6. Why is going to the synagogue not the same as going to church?

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7. Identify:

a. Abram

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b. Terah

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c. Lot

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d. Isaac

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e. Jacob

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f. Joseph

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g. Moses

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h. Zaphnathpaaneah

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8. Why did Stephen call the Jews "stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ear"?

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9. Contrast Jesus' first and second comings.

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10. Why did Stephen's sermon so enrage the Jews?

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## Lesson 11

# Acts 7:54-8:40

### Recap

*We are studying through the Book of Acts because it is the blueprint for the New Testament church. Above all else, we want to be a New Testament church.*

*In the last lesson we discussed Stephen, who was one of the first deacons of the church. The word deacon comes from the Greek diakonos, which means "servant."*

*The emphasis in Stephen's life is on fullness: he was full of the Holy Spirit, full of wisdom, full of faith, and full of power. In Scripture, to be "full of" means "to be controlled by." Stephen was a God-controlled man who had a huge impact on his church – and he was not one of the leaders, just a servant.*

*In lesson 10, we left off at Acts 7:51-53 where Stephen accused the Jews of killing their Messiah. He said:*

*"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it" (Acts 7:51-53).*

*The Jews were proud of their covenant seal of circumcision, which symbolized their relationship with God. In labeling them "uncircumcised in heart and ears," Stephen accused the Jews of not keeping the covenant. They had persecuted the prophets just as their forefathers had done and had killed the Messiah.*

*At this point, their hatred for the name of Jesus exploded at Stephen. This is where this lesson begins.*

## **Acts 7:54-56**

“When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:54-56).

The *right hand* is a Hebrew idiom meaning “the place of power.” This isn’t saying that Jesus is “beside” God; this is saying that Jesus is God. Consider:

“Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy” (Exodus 15:6).

The power of God destroyed the enemy.

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18).

Jesus has all power in Heaven and in earth because He alone is God. *All* means “all.”

“And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: but this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God” (Hebrews 10:11-12).

Neither the Tabernacle in the wilderness nor the Temple had chairs, for the work of the priest was never finished. However, after Jesus ascended and offered His perfect sacrifice for sin once and for all, He sat down at the place of power. (God is a Spirit and therefore does not have hands.)

So why did Stephen see Jesus standing? Theologians debate this point without offering definitive conclusions. Perhaps Jesus stood to encourage and to

welcome the church's first martyr to Heaven. Jesus stood up for Stephen. And He stands up for us.

## **Acts 7:57-60**

"Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep" (Acts 7:57-60).

It's noteworthy to realize that Stephen died as his Savior did. Stephen's final words echo Jesus' statement on the cross: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34a). And like Jesus who cried, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost" (Luke 23:46), Stephen cried, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

The young man at whose feet the witnesses cast their robes was Saul of Tarsus. This is the same person who would encounter Jesus on the road to Damascus in Acts 9 and who would have his named changed to Paul.

Paul never forgot the stoning of Stephen. He said in Acts 22:20, "And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him." Paul never got the image of the stoning out of his mind. He watched a man give his life for a Savior and he never retaliated. Stephen's face glowed like that of an angel. Something about Stephen's death haunted Paul and etched the event in his memory.

The Scriptures say that Stephen "fell asleep." When Christians die, they "fall asleep." Jesus didn't call death, "death" – so the early church didn't either. Compare the following verses of Scripture:

"These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep" (John 11:11).

“He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn” (Matthew 9:24).

“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope” (I Thessalonians 4:13).

Death for the Christian is falling asleep in Jesus and waking up in His presence eternally. This is the hope anyone can have; it is the hope of the church. Jesus Christ has triumphed over death, Hell, and the grave. Paul said, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). Death for a Christian is simply getting into the presence of God that much faster.

## **Acts 8:1-4**

“And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:1-4).

The stoning of Stephen encouraged Paul to attack the church. Paul later testified, “I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women” (Acts 22:4).

Jesus had made His prophetic statement in Acts 1:8, “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The disciples, however, never dreamed that it would be accomplished through circumstances that put them in uncomfortable places.

Persecution has never stopped the church. When Christians scatter abroad, seeds of the gospel are sown and bear fruit everywhere. God takes what appears to be horrible circumstances and uses them for good. As Paul stated,

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

One of the Christians who was “scattered” abroad was Philip, who like Stephen had been one of the seven deacons appointed in Acts 6. He ended up among the hated, half-breed Samaritans and began preaching.

### **Acts 8:5-8**

“Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city” (Acts 8:5-8).

A few chapters later, Dr. Luke recorded, “And the next day we that were of Paul’s company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him” (Acts 21:8). Acts 21:8 calls Philip “the evangelist,” not because he ministered to saints—as in the twenty-first-century use of the word—but because he won sinners to the Lord. Remember, Philip was not even one of the church leaders. Nevertheless, he was a soulwinner.

God gives us evangelists—people especially gifted in getting out into a sin-sick world and being a light. Evangelists don’t have to have a platform, a pulpit, a church building, or a repertoire of sermons. Philip was an evangelist in the biblical sense of the word because he witnessed and won souls to Christ.

Saints of God preach the Word. They preach it with their lives and they preach it with their witness. God, give us evangelists in the pews. God, give us evangelists who do not feel they must be on staff or have a title or position. God, give us evangelists who care for the lost.

### **Acts 8:9-13**

“But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done” (Acts 8:9-13).

Simon had ulterior motives in following Philip. Simon wanted the people to think he was great, having deluded them through sorcery. Simon believed in Jesus, but he seemed to be more interested in the miracles and signs that accompanied Philip’s ministry.

Acts 8:12 states, “But when they believed . . . they were baptized.” Believing on Jesus Christ or accepting Him as your Savior is a good start, but it is not enough. When the Samaritans heard the Word and believed, they were baptized.

God has a greater experience for you than simply giving mental assent to the personage of Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself stated in Mark 16:16, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” Baptism in Jesus’ name is essential to salvation. If one really believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, then one will be baptized in His name for the remission of sins. One has not obeyed Christ until he or she believes and is baptized.

We need an emphasis in the twenty-first-century church on what the first-century church preached and practiced.

## **Acts 8:14-17**

“Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord



Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost" (Acts 8:14-17).

Note that the first-century church *didn't* believe that anyone had "received the Holy Spirit" just because they had believed. These Samaritans had all believed and been baptized, but the Bible is clear they had not received the Holy Ghost. God wants you to continue on until you have received the Holy Ghost just like the one hundred and twenty on the Day of Pentecost. He wants you to have the full salvation experience.

Also, note that the first-century church *did* believe that the baptism of the Holy Ghost was essential to salvation. That's why the apostles made the trip from Jerusalem (when they should have been in hiding) to lay hands on them that they might receive the Holy Ghost.

If it was essential that the apostles made the trip to Samaria, don't you think that it's essential for believers to be baptized in the Holy Ghost in the twenty-first century when modern culture is sensual, violent, uncommitted, and casual?

## **Acts 8:18-25**

"And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me. And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans" (Acts 8:18-25).

This is where Simon turns and goes back to his old "sorcerer ways," wanting to have power over the people once again. Note that he didn't ask for

power to do any of the miracles or signs he had seen. He asked for power to lay hands on people to receive the Holy Ghost. Simon realized that being filled with the Holy Ghost was a greater power.

What did he observe that made him want this power so much? Speaking in tongues. This is the New Testament pattern. A few years later Luke would record in Acts 10:45-46a, "And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God." Peter and the other Jews knew that Cornelius and his household had received the Holy Ghost for they heard them speak in other tongues.

Simon the sorcerer asked other people to pray for him, but we don't know if he ever prayed or received the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

It is at this point that the Lord directed Philip to leave the crowd at his "revival meetings" and go out into the desert to meet with one person. We are often willing to do the "big things" for God but reluctant to do the "small things." This is not the spirit of the New Testament church. The spirit of the New Testament church is "where He leads me I will follow" – on the mountaintop or in the valley, in a crowd or all alone.

Philip's leaving the revival crowd in Samaria to go to the desert shows the importance of one individual. God used Philip to reach a man who would influence an entire nation. Remember, Philip was not even one of the leaders of the church. "And these signs shall follow them that believe . . . they shall speak with new tongues" (Mark 16:17).

## **Acts 8:26-29**

"And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot" (Acts 8:26-29).

You never know whom you are witnessing to or what God will eventually accomplish through the one person your testimony impacts:

- In Acts 8, it was one anonymous Ethiopian treasurer.
- In Acts 9, it was one Pharisee named Saul.
- In Acts 9, it was one tailor named Dorcas.
- In Acts 10, it was one Roman centurion named Cornelius.
- In Acts 14, it was one anonymous crippled man.
- In Acts 16, it was one seller of cloth named Lydia.
- In Acts 16, it was one anonymous Philippian jailer.
- In Acts 18, it was one ruler of the synagogue named Crispus.
- In Acts 18, it was one eloquent preacher named Apollos.

When one person receives Apostolic truth and is baptized, his life is like a stone thrown into a lake. The ripples of the experience continue on and on and influence thousands.

### **Acts 8:30-35**

“And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: in his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus” (Acts 8:30-35).

The eunuch was reading Isaiah 53, the great messianic chapter, which covers the birth, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. This chapter is the great prophetic lens of the Old Testament. The eunuch was at verses 7-8, “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall

declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.”

Notice was Philip did.

1. He opened his mouth.  
Stop walking around as if you are embarrassed to be Jesus’ disciple. Stop walking around as if you are ashamed to be Pentecostal. Stop walking around as if you have a Christian inferiority complex. Open your mouth. People want to talk. They want to know what you think.
2. He began where the eunuch was.  
Don’t be discouraged if the people you are witnessing to don’t run to the altar the first time you bring them to church. Don’t be frustrated if they don’t want a Bible study after your first conversation. Don’t be disillusioned if they don’t pray through to the Holy Ghost in the market when you say a quite prayer. Begin where they are and lead them to Jesus.
3. He told him about Jesus.  
Don’t give them your church’s doctrinal statement. Tell them about Jesus. Tell them what Jesus did for you. Preach Jesus. Lift up Jesus.

Begin where they are and preach Jesus. That’s all Philip did, that’s all the church in Acts did, and that’s all you need to do.

## **Acts 8:36**

“And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?” (Acts 8:36).

Isaiah 53 doesn’t say anything about being baptized, or even about water, but please note that when they *preached Jesus* in the New Testament, that involved being *baptized in Jesus’ name*. If Jesus died for us, if He was buried, and if He arose again, then we need to die to our sinful life (repent), be buried in Christ (baptism in Jesus’ name), and arise to newness of life (receive the Holy Ghost).

## Acts 8:37-40

“And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea” (Acts 8:37-40).

“They went down both into the water” indicates that the New Testament church always immersed during baptism.

The Ethiopian eunuch would always have been treated as a second-class citizen in the Jewish religion. According to Deuteronomy 23:1, eunuchs were not allowed to enter into the congregation of the Lord. And yet this Ethiopian eunuch was so hungry for God that he traveled many miles to the Temple in Jerusalem. Thank God, he found the New Testament church.

We know where Philip’s “Bible study” started (Isaiah 53:7-8) because Luke tells us. But have you ever wondered where it ended? I think it may have ended three chapters later, as they were reading through the scroll of Isaiah:

“Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the *eunuch* say, Behold, I am a dry tree. For thus saith the LORD unto the *eunuchs* that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off” (Isaiah 56:3-5, emphasis added).

This man who had been *rejected* by the Jewish religion found out that he could be *accepted* by God. And I think that’s why he stopped the chariot and cried out, “Here’s water! I want to be baptized!”

Everyone is welcome in the church of the living God. “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:27-29).

“And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip . . . . But Philip was found at Azotus.” Philip experienced “supernatural transport” like the prophet Elijah. Have you ever noticed that miracles, even outstanding ones, are not a “big deal” in the Book of Acts? The message they preach is the “big deal!” How often do we get that backwards in the twenty-first century?

Philip was the right man in the right place at the right time saying the right thing to the right person. And remember, Philip was not a leader in the church. He was appointed to wait on tables. However, God powerfully used him. You too can be powerfully used by God.

## What Have You Learned?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. What was the Jews’ reaction to Stephen’s accusations against them?

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2. When used as a Hebrew idiom, what does *right hand* mean or signify?

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3. On what basis could Jesus say that all power in Heaven and earth belonged to Him? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. Why did the Tabernacle and Temple not have any chairs?

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5. Why do YOU think Stephen saw Jesus standing?

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6. What was Stephen's last prayer?

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7. Who consented to Stephen's death? Why?

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8. What is death for a Christian?

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9. What did the stoning of Stephen encourage Saul of Tarsus to do?

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10. What happened when the church was persecuted?

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11. Philip was appointed as a deacon. Why was he called an evangelist?

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12. What does an evangelist do?

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13. Who was Simon? What was his motivation?

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14. What did the Samaritans do when they heard the Word?

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15. Why did Peter and John go to Samaria?

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16. What did the New Testament church teach about receiving the Holy Ghost?

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17. What did Simon desire?

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18. Why did the angel tell Philip to go to the desert?

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19. Who was the eunuch? What was he doing when Philip met him?

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20. What three steps did Philip use to lead the eunuch to Christ?

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B. \_\_\_\_\_

C. \_\_\_\_\_

## **Personal Study Notes**

## Lesson 12

# Acts 9:1-31

### Recap

*One of the Christians scattered by persecution was Philip. Like Stephen, Philip was one of the seven deacons appointed in Acts 6. The term deacon is from the Greek word diakonos, which simply means “a servant.” According to Acts 8:5, “Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.” In Acts 21:8, Luke called Philip an “evangelist” not because he ministered to saints, but because he won sinners to God. And he was not even one of the leaders.*

*At the height of Philip’s “revival meetings” in Samaria, the Lord directed Philip to leave the crowd and go out into the desert to meet with one person. Luke recorded:*

*“And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. . . . Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus” (Acts 8:27-28, 35).*

*Philip did not know the importance of the man in the chariot. The eunuch was the treasurer for Queen Candace of Ethiopia. History bears out that this eunuch founded the church in Ethiopia.*

*Philip began where the eunuch was reading and began to preach Jesus. That’s all Philip did, that’s all the church in Acts did, and that’s all you need to do.*

*“And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?” (Acts 8:36).*

*Isaiah 53 doesn't say anything about being baptized – or even about water – but please note that when they preached Jesus in the New Testament, that involved being baptized in Jesus' name. Luke wrote in Acts 8:37-40:*

*And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.*

*Luke's statement “they went down both into the water” can only mean that Philip immersed the eunuch when Philip baptized him. Immersion was the only baptismal practice of the early church.*

*The Ethiopian eunuch would always have been treated as a second-class citizen in the Jewish religion. According to Deuteronomy 23:1, he would not have been allowed to enter into the congregation of the Lord. Yet he was so hungry for God that he traveled many miles to the Temple in Jerusalem. Thank God, he found the New Testament church.*

*Paul stated, “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:27-29).*

*According to Acts 8:39, Philip experienced “supernatural transport” like the prophet Elijah. He was in Samaria and then found in Azotus, a distance of about thirty miles. Have you ever noticed that miracles, even outstanding ones, are not a “big deal” in the Book of Acts? The message they preach is the “big deal.” How often do we get that backwards in the twenty-first century?*

*Philip was the right man in the right place at the right time, saying the right thing to the right person. Remember, Philip was not even one of the leaders. He was simply a deacon, a servant assigned to care for widows. Philip's experience shows God can powerfully use you without having a title or position in the church.*

## Acts 9:1-2

“And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem” (Acts 9:1-2).

Saul was an important man, highly respected in the Jewish religion, and the high priest vested him with authority to persecute the church. Acts 9, 22, and 26 contain various details of Saul’s testimony. Consider:

“I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day. And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women” (Acts 22:3-4).

“I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities” (Acts 26:9-11).

“Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ” (Philippians 3:4-7).

By Paul’s own testimony, he had a proud Jewish pedigree that surpassed most (“If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more”). He was trained by the leading rabbi of his time (“brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of

the fathers"). As a Pharisee, he scrupulously followed the letter of the Law ("touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless"). And he received authorization from the very top, the high priest, to terrorize the Christians ("many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests"). Through torture, persecution, imprisonment, and death, Paul forced Christians to blaspheme. He did what he did because of misdirected religious zeal.

Some thirty years later, Paul wrote that Christ had "apprehended him." He was out to arrest others when the Lord arrested him.

"Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12-14).

Paul was saying, "Just as much as I pursued the church to persecute it, God was pursuing me to save me . . . and I'm so grateful that I am now pursuing Christ with everything in me. I'm running after God's purpose!"

### **Acts 9:3-9**

"And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink" (Acts 9:3-9).

When Saul started his journey to Damascus, he did not realize that Jesus was pursuing him and had a special work for him to do.

In response to the divine question, Paul asked, "Who are You, Lord?" Imagine Paul's utter amazement when the voice said, "I AM JESUS!" *How can this be? Jesus died on a cross. His followers stole His body. Jesus is a hoax. I have dedicated my life to stamp out the heresies about Jesus. I have relentlessly persecuted and killed His followers. What have I done?*

After identifying Himself, Jesus stated, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." The pricks referred to the goads, sharpened sticks, used to drive oxen and cattle. Cattlemen prodded the oxen to move by jabbing the goad into their sides. If the animals kicked against the goad, they inflicted more pain on themselves. Jesus was saying, "I have been pricking your heart with the goad of conviction, and if you don't repent, it's going to be hard for you." No doubt, the memories of all the Christians Saul had killed instantly convicted him.

Confronted with undeniable truth, Saul instantly repented, recognized Jesus as his master, and asked, "What wilt thou have me to *do*?" Jesus replied, "It shall be told thee what thou must *do*."

Saul's question is the same one the Jews asked Peter on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:37. Saul had had a spiritual experience on the road to Damascus. He had had an encounter with Jesus. He had surrendered his life to Jesus, but Saul wasn't *saved* yet. He needed to *do* something. Jesus said, "Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do."

It is dangerous for people who have had a "religious experience" to base their salvation on emotions. People who have had a spiritual encounter but whose lifestyle, belief system, priorities, and values have not changed should not base their eternal destiny on mere feeling. Salvation must be based on the Word of God.

Just because you feel "spiritual" today does not mean you are saved. Conversely, just because you are depressed does not mean God has kicked you out of the Kingdom. Instead of being guided by feelings, build a relationship with God through obedience.

## **Acts 9:10-16**

“And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, and hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake” (Acts 9:10-16).

Saul’s reputation had preceded him to Damascus. Ananias knew the stories of the intense persecution, beatings, imprisonment, and even death. Saul was a terrorist. He was a Christian-killer. Naturally, Ananias would be fearful to visit Saul. Nevertheless, he obeyed.

Please note that the Lord told Saul, “It shall be told thee what thou must do,” and yet the Lord didn’t tell Ananias what to tell Saul to do. Why? This “omission” only proves that as a New Testament believer, Ananias already knew exactly what a sinner needed to do to be saved. Peter had preached it in Acts 2:38, and it was what the church continued to preach.

If you want a relationship with God, step back into the very first New Testament church service and follow the blueprint that Peter gave on the Day of Pentecost: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38).

## **Acts 9:17-18**

“And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been



scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized" (Acts 9:17-18).

Saul had already repented, and now Ananias told him to be baptized and that he would be filled with the Holy Ghost. Acts 9:18 simply states that he "arose, and was baptized." But later in Acts 22:16, Paul recounts the actual words that Ananias actually spoke to him: "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16).

*"Saul, you had an experience with Jesus on the road to Damascus. What are you waiting for? Get up and get baptized, and have your sins washed away by having the name of the Lord called over you."*

Believers should be baptized as quickly as possible after they repent. That is the pattern established in the New Testament church. Consider:

- "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and *the same day* there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41, emphasis added).
- "But *when they believed* Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12, emphasis added).
- "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? *And he commanded them* to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days" (Acts 10:44-48, emphasis added).
- "Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. *When they heard this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:4-5, emphasis added).
- "And now *why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized*, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16, emphasis added).

Everyone needs to be baptized in the name of Jesus. Why?

“For in him [Jesus] dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Colossians 2:9-15).

According to Colossians 2:11, circumcision was the way to enter God’s covenant in the Old Testament and spiritual circumcision (“made without hands”) is the way in the New Testament.

Among the redemptive covenants, the most comprehensive one is the *Abrahamic Covenant*, which either explicitly or implicitly includes in itself all previous and subsequent covenants. Its ultimate fulfillment is not found in earthly Israel, but in the New Testament church.

Stephen rightly referred to the Abrahamic Covenant as “the covenant of circumcision,” for that act served as the covenantal seal. Stephen said, “And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs” (Acts 7:8). From the very moment God made this covenant with Abraham, the world would forever be divided into two ethnic groups: the uncircumcised and the circumcised, the Gentile and the Jew.

“Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:11-12).

Only after the physical act of circumcision did a covenant relationship exist in God’s mind, thus *no circumcision, no covenant*. Can God be that demanding?

Remember that we would not have the chance of a relationship with God if it were not for His love in initiating the covenant. God has a right to *demand* that we enter *His covenant* on *His terms*. It is important to note that this “covenant of circumcision” was an outward physical act (“in your flesh”), but it initiated man into a spiritual covenant (“everlasting covenant”). If this covenant was indeed “everlasting,” then there must still exist a “covenant of circumcision” today.

The Lord told Abraham, “He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant” (Genesis 17:13).

What is New Testament circumcision? According to Colossians 2:12 it is being “buried with him [Jesus] in baptism.” Galatians 3:26-29 states:

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

*Baptism in Jesus’ name is New Testament circumcision.*

In the New Testament, *circumcision* can refer either to the *physical ritual* practiced by the Jews, or to the *spiritual seal* of the new birth, which is the *fulfillment* of the Abrahamic Covenant. It is crucial to make this distinction, for while the apostles preached that the temporal form of circumcision was passing away, they also declared that spiritual circumcision was an *absolute necessity* for salvation. Consider:

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28:19).

“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16).

“And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47).

In Luke's parallel passage, he substitutes "remission of sins" for "baptism"—because they are equivalent terms. That is why on the Day of Pentecost, "Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38).

## **Acts 9:19-25**

"And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ. And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: but their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket" (Acts 9:19-25).

"And after that many days were fulfilled . . . ." As Paul records in his later writings, he spent many days alone in Arabia just seeking the Lord. Then he returned to Damascus to preach until persecution forced him from the city. He continued to preach in that region, and it was a full three years before he finally went to Jerusalem (Galatians 1:11-24). He also later recorded some of the persecutions he faced during his early ministry. In II Corinthians 11:24-27, he stated:

"Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness."

## Acts 9:26-31

Paul was “unknown by face” (Galatians 1:22) to the church in Jerusalem. They did not know what he looked like. They just knew him as a Christian-killer—a sinner too vile to be saved. It was doubtful they would have accepted him at all were it not for the recommendation of Barnabas. Luke recorded:

“And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus. Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied” (Acts 9:26-31).

Everywhere Paul went, he faced persecution from the Jews as well as the Christians. The Jews were amazed that Paul was boldly speaking in the name of Jesus. The Christians mistrusted him.

Never underestimate the impact of one obscure saint such as Ananias or Barnabas. Without these two men to influence, mentor, and stand up for Paul, Paul’s ministry would have been ineffective. Likewise, never underestimate the impact of one converted sinner such as Saul of Tarsus who became the apostle Paul. Paul was an obscure Christian with a lot of baggage from his days as the chief persecutor of the church. Nevertheless, he exemplifies what God can do with an obscure, baggage-laden soul committed to Him.

## What Have You Learned?

1. What was Paul’s Jewish pedigree?

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2. What did Paul mean when he stated, "I am apprehended of Christ Jesus"?

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3. Why was Saul going to Damascus?

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4. Describe Saul's experience on the road to Damascus as recorded in Acts 9:3-9.

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5. How do we know that Saul repented?

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6. What is a goad? How and why was it used?

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7. What did Jesus tell Saul to do?

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8. Who was Ananias?

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9. What were Jesus' instructions to Ananias?

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10. What plan did Jesus have for Saul's life?

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11. What were Ananias's instructions to Saul?

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12. When should a person be baptized?

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13. In Colossians 2 Paul likened baptism to what Old Testament rite? Why?

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14. What is the Abrahamic Covenant?

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15. What is New Testament circumcision?

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## Lesson 13

# Acts 9:32-10:48

### Recap

*The Book of Acts isn't just about superstar preachers. In fact, it's largely about ordinary Christians who witnessed about Jesus Christ everywhere they went. Out of the seven deacons appointed in Acts 6, we read about the impact of Steven in Acts 7 and of Philip in Acts 8.*

*Luke recorded, "Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus" (Acts 8:35). In witnessing to the eunuch, Philip began where he was reading in the Scriptures and preached Jesus. That's all Philip did. That's all the church in Acts did. And that's all you need to do. Simply follow Philip's three steps:*

- 1. Open your mouth*
- 2. Start where the person is – at the level of his or her understanding of Jesus*
- 3. Preach Jesus.*

*In Acts 9, we read about the dramatic conversion of Saul of Tarsus, who later became widely known as Paul the apostle. But Paul wouldn't have experienced salvation if it hadn't been for Ananias, and he wouldn't have been accepted by the New Testament church if it hadn't been for Barnabas. Consider Luke's report in Acts 9:*

*"And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 9:17).*

*“But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus” (Acts 9:27).*

*Never underestimate the impact of one “obscure” saint of God. Paul’s impact on the New Testament church was the result of two little-known believers obeying God.*

*For the remainder of the Book of Acts, Paul essentially becomes the main character. But first, we will briefly revisit the ongoing ministry of Peter in Acts 9 and 10. Although he is not as prominent as Paul, please note that it is Peter’s ministry that is associated with all of the major transitions in Acts (using the “keys” to reach Jews in Acts 2, Samaritans in Acts 8, and Gentiles in Acts 10).*

### **Acts 9:32-35**

*“And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda. And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy. And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately. And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord” (Acts 9:32-35).*

The apostle Peter had been engaged in an itinerant ministry that took him to Lydda, a largely Gentile city about twenty-five miles from Jerusalem. Disciples who had been scattered by persecution had evangelized the area and Peter now joined them. His ministry there was highlighted by the healing of the bed-ridden Aeneas, which led to the conversion of “all that dwelt at Lydda and in the coastal plain of Sharon.” According to Acts 8:25, Peter preached “in many villages of the Samaritans” while Philip the evangelist, according to Acts 8:40, ministered throughout the area “in all the cities.” And God worked with them.

### **Acts 9:36-43**

*“Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. And it came to pass in those*

days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive. And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord. And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner" (Acts 9:36-43).

Joppa (modern Jaffa) was located on the seacoast, ten miles beyond Lydda. It was from here that the prophet Jonah embarked for Tarshish when he tried to flee from God (Jonah 1:1-3). Jonah went to Joppa to avoid going to the Gentiles, but Peter in Joppa received his call to go to the Gentiles. Because Jonah disobeyed God, the Lord sent a storm that caused the Gentile sailors to fear. Because Peter obeyed the Lord, God sent the "wind of the Spirit" that caused the Gentiles to rejoice. What a contrast.

Peter was not in Joppa merely by accident. You are not where you are by accident either. God has strategically placed you where you are—on your job, in your school, and in your neighborhood—so you can open your mouth and preach Jesus.

Peter was in Joppa on divine assignment for several reasons. When Dorcas died, the believers in the city sent for him immediately. None of the apostles had raised the dead up to this point, but they had faith in the words of Jesus to His disciples: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, 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).

It has always been God's will to have the pagan, sensual Gentiles in His church, but the Jewish believers who were already saved didn't have the right mindset. Perhaps they were so busy trying to keep the church "clean" that they didn't think to reach out to those who were different. Nevertheless, God didn't

mind “messing up” their comfortable church to see souls saved. As the wise man stated, “Where no oxen are, the crib is clean: but much increase is by the strength of the ox” (Proverbs 14:4).

The same is true in the twenty-first-century church. If we want a neat, little church where our accomplishment for the week is coming together to pat each other on the back and say, “We know the truth, hallelujah to the Lamb,” we have missed the point. If we want pure first-century church, then we will have to do something different from corrupted, traditional twenty-first-century church. The Holy Ghost needs to invade us with a spirit that says we want to get back to the original church. It’s not enough to get back to the original doctrine. We need to have the experience of the first-century church. We need its power and zeal to witness for Jesus.

Being a first-century church member wasn’t just about showing up for church; it was about going forth. When Jesus first called His disciples, He said, “Come and see.” But then He said, “Go and tell.”

Ten years after the Day of Pentecost, the Jewish believers were just beginning to move out of their comfort zone to the Samaritans. If it hadn’t been for direct divine intervention, it probably would have taken another ten years even to think about reaching out to the pagan Gentiles.

God’s promise to Abraham and the voice of the prophets point to Gentiles in the church:

“And in thy seed shall *all the nations* of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice” (Genesis 22:18, emphasis added).

“And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for *a light to the Gentiles*, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6, emphasis added).

“Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And *the Gentiles shall come to thy light*, and kings to the brightness of thy rising” (Isaiah 60:1-3, emphasis added).

“For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same *my name shall be great among the Gentiles*; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts” (Malachi 1:11, emphasis added).

It has always been God’s will for the Gentiles to be in the church. The Messiah was not just for the Jews. The Gentiles were to come into the light of the revelation of God in Christ. The name of Jesus was to be exalted among the Gentiles. How in the world did the early church miss these promises?

## Acts 10:1-2

“There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and *prayed to God always*” (Acts 10:1-2, emphasis added).

1. While Jesus was speaking forth the promise of the Holy Ghost . . .
2. While the disciples were watching the Lord ascend up into Heaven . . .
3. While the eleven were choosing Matthias to take the place of Judas . . .
4. While the believers were waiting together in the upper room . . .
5. While the Holy Ghost was falling and they were speaking with other tongues . . .
6. While Peter was preaching his sermon on the Day of Pentecost . . .
7. While three thousand were added to the church and baptized in Jesus’ name . . .
8. While the lame man was leaping and dancing his way into the Temple . . .
9. While Peter and John were standing their ground before the council . . .
10. While Ananias and Sapphira were lying to the Holy Ghost . . .
11. While the apostles were being persecuted, arrested, jailed, and beaten . . .
12. While the place where the church had gathered for prayer was shaken . . .
13. While seven deacons were appointed and began to serve the church . . .
14. While Stephen was preaching his sermon and being stoned for it . . .
15. While Simon the sorcerer was trying to purchase the power of God . . .
16. While Philip the evangelist was baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch . . .
17. While Saul was being apprehended by Jesus on the Damascus road . . .
18. While Peter was praying and Dorcas was being raised from the dead . . .

. . . *Cornelius was praying.*

The Jewish believers gathered, the Holy Ghost fell, and the building shook. However, as a Gentile, Cornelius didn't experience any of the good things that God was doing in the church. Cornelius was a good man—but he wasn't saved. He feared God—but he wasn't saved. He was devout—but he wasn't saved. He gave alms—but he wasn't saved. He prayed to God every day—but he wasn't saved.

Someone in your family, among your co-workers or fellow-students, or in your neighborhood is a modern-day Cornelius. He may look like everything is okay, but his soul cries out for more of God. You need to be sensitive to the Spirit, open your mouth, meet him at his level of understanding of God, and preach Jesus to him.

The original church was about more than doctrine. The experience of the early church gave the believers a message and a method. Everywhere they went, they preached Jesus. Modern Pentecostalism should be more than what we believe. It should be what we believe and what we do.

## **Acts 10:3-8**

“He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, *Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.* And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: *he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.* And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; and when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa” (Acts 10:3-8, emphasis added).

In the case of the Ethiopian eunuch, an angel appeared to the preacher and sent him to the inquirer. In the case of Cornelius, the angel appeared to the inquirer and told him to send for the preacher. In both cases, the work of the

angel was merely to bring the two men together, face-to-face . . . because an angel can't preach the gospel; only human beings can.

Peter stated, "Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into" (I Peter 1:12). The angels are jealous because they do not have the Spirit of God flowing through them and they cannot proclaim the gospel.

Cornelius was very religious. He prayed. He gave alms to the poor. He feared God. But he wasn't saved yet because good works will not save anyone. Cornelius was "ready" to be saved, but needed a preacher to tell him what to do. That's why God was working on both ends of the situation to bring them together.

## **Acts 10:9-18**

*"On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: and he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, and saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, and called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there" (Acts 10:9-18).*

God's timing is always perfect. The three men from Caesarea arrived at the door just as Peter was pondering the meaning of the vision.

It's not enough just for God to prepare sinners . . . if the preachers aren't prepared for what God wants to do we will miss the opportunity. And we are all "preachers" of the gospel. Paul stated in II Corinthians 3:2-6:

Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

So why did the angel instruct Cornelius to send for Peter, who was thirty miles away in Joppa, when Philip the evangelist was already right there in Caesarea? Because Jesus had given Peter, not Philip, the *keys* to the Kingdom. Jesus said, "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:18-19).

It was necessary for every people group specified in Acts 1:8 to enter into the Kingdom in exactly the same way. That is why Jesus prophesied, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Peter used his keys to bring the Jews, the mixed Samaritans, and the Gentiles into the New Testament church.

## **Acts 10:19-24**

"While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, *doubting nothing*: for I have sent them. Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come? And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report



among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee. Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him. And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends” (Acts 10:19-24, emphasis added).

In Acts 10:20, “doubting nothing” means “making no distinctions.” In other words, Peter was instructed to treat the visitors as if they were Jews. Consequently, Peter graciously accepted Cornelius’s invitation.

Cornelius invited his family and friends because he wanted all of them to hear what Peter had to say.

### **Acts 10:25-33**

“And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man. And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore came I unto you *without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for*: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me? And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. *Immediately therefore I sent to thee*; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, *to hear all things that are commanded thee of God*” (Acts 10:25-33, emphasis added).

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter preached that the promise of the Holy Ghost “is unto you [the Jews], and to your children, and to all that are afar off,

even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). However, he did not understand the breadth of the statement or he did not believe it until he received the visions in Joppa.

Peter and Cornelius both realized how miraculous it was for Jews to be fellowshiping with Gentiles. God had opened Peter's understanding that He is no respecter of persons regarding salvation. That is why Peter "without gainsaying" (Acts 10:29) – "without any questioning" – entered into Cornelius's home.

### **Acts 10:34-43**

"Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that *God is no respecter of persons*: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. *To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins*" (Acts 10:34-43, emphasis added).

Acts 10:43 shows that Peter was making his way through the gospel like he did in Acts 2, preaching how Jesus *died* so that his hearers would *repent*. Then as he began to preach *baptism* ("through his name" . . . "remission of sins"), the Holy Ghost interrupted the sermon. (This event is our precedent for believers receiving the Holy Ghost before they are baptized – but they still *must* be baptized.)

## Acts 10:44-48

“While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. *For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God.* Then answered Peter, *Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.* Then prayed they him to tarry certain days” (Acts 10:44-48, emphasis added).

The Bible contains no such thing as a Christian who was not baptized in Jesus’ name or a Christian who didn’t receive the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in tongues. It is the universal pattern in Acts ...

- When the church began on the Day of Pentecost, the disciples spoke in tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-4).
- Simon the sorcerer observed “evidence” when the Samaritans received the Holy Ghost by laying on of hands (Acts 8:14-20).
- Paul had this experience (Acts 9:17-18), for he spoke with tongues more than anyone in the Corinthian church (I Corinthians 14:18).
- Believers who had only experienced John’s baptism were re-baptized and spoke with tongues (Acts 19:1-6).
- Cornelius’s household, who were Gentiles, spoke with other tongues when they received the Holy Ghost (Acts 10:44-48). There wouldn’t be any Gentile Christians today if it hadn’t been for speaking in tongues – that’s the only reason the Jews let us in the church.

Even though these believers had *repented* and received the *Holy Ghost*, Peter immediately returned to the fact that they needed to be *baptized* in order to receive “remission of sins” . . . “through his name.” Why? Because these three steps are the *keys* that he used on the Day of Pentecost to unlock salvation for the Jews. Baptism is not an option, for Peter “commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.”

“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you,

and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:38-39).

Under the anointing, Peter preached something on the Day of Pentecost that he didn't even believe (not even ten years later). Yet, finally, in Cornelius's house, he believed it because he realized that "God is no respecter of persons."

And God is no respecter of persons today.

## What Have You Learned?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. Who are the two main characters in the Book of Acts?  
\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_
2. According to Acts 8, which two disciples preached in Samaria?  
\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_
3. Who was the man that Peter healed of palsy?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What role did persecution of the church in Jerusalem have on the evangelization of Samaria? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Why did the Jews hate Samaritans? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. Who was Dorcas? Describe her good works. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
7. What was the result of Dorcas being raised from the dead?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
8. In whose home did Peter stay after the raising of Dorcas? In what city was this home located? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
9. Which Old Testament prophet is associated with Joppa? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
10. What Scripture verses indicate that God always intended for Gentile believers to be in the church? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
11. Who was Cornelius? What was his rank? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
12. Describe Cornelius's piety. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

13. Why didn't the angel tell Cornelius what to do to be saved?

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14. Why did the angel tell Cornelius to send for Peter?

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15. Describe Peter's vision.

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16. How did the Jews know the Gentiles had received the Holy Ghost?

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17. What did Peter command the Gentiles to do after they received the Holy Ghost? \_\_\_\_\_

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18. In Acts 10:20, what does "doubting nothing" mean?

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19. In Acts 10:29, what does "without gainsaying" mean?

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## Lesson 14

# Acts 11:1-30

### Recap

*Acts 10 is a phenomenal chapter in the history of the New Testament church. If it were not for Acts 10, Gentile Christians would not exist today. If you are non-Jewish, you owe your life, heritage, salvation, and eternal future to a meeting of destiny with a Gentile centurion named Cornelius and a Jewish disciple of Jesus named Peter. Prior to this meeting, the only people in the church were Jews, a few proselytes to the Jewish faith, and some Samaritans after Acts 8. In Acts 10, the door opened for Gentiles to enter into the church.*

*Peter did not want to go to the house of a Gentile. Peter was a Jew and never fellowshiped with Gentiles. However, God sent Peter a vision, which convinced him that God was no respecter of persons. At the same time, in response to an angelic visitation, Cornelius sent men to bring Peter to his home. The Lord commanded Peter to go with the men. Peter entered the house and began to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

*“While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days” (Acts 10:44-48).*

*Peter and the Jews that accompanied him were astonished that the Gentiles had received the Holy Ghost. They didn't believe it could happen. However, they knew the Gentiles had received the Holy Ghost for they heard them speak with other tongues. The*

*only reason Gentiles are in the church today is because of speaking in other tongues. The only reason Peter and the Jews let Cornelius and his household into the church is they heard them speak in other tongues. The Holy Ghost fell on the Gentiles “as on us at the beginning” (Acts 11:15) – like it did on the Jews on the Day of Pentecost. Tongues was the initial supernatural sign of someone receiving the Holy Ghost in the early church. It is still the supernatural initial sign today.*

*Peter certainly never expected to be the one God would use to open the door of salvation to the Gentiles. He was as surprised as anyone else when they received the Holy Ghost as he began to preach the gospel. However, he knew exactly what to command when they did – baptism. “Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (Acts 10:46b-48a). Why? Because this is the New Testament pattern of obeying the gospel! As on the Day of Pentecost, “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38).*

*Sadly, one of the things Peter probably did expect was the opposition of the Jewish believers toward these Gentiles experiencing the new birth. They just didn’t believe God would actually do something like that.*

### **Acts 11:1-3**

*“And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them” (Acts 11:1-3)*

Notice that instead of rejoicing that “the Gentiles had also received the word of God” – that the Gentiles had received the Holy Ghost and that the Gentiles had been baptized in Jesus’ name – these men were upset with Peter, assuming that he had not kept the traditions of the Jewish law regarding eating certain foods. There is nothing inherently wrong with a “tradition” – unless it gets in the way of what God’s Spirit wants to do.

Jesus experienced similar criticism. Mark recorded:



“Then came together unto him [Jesus] the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables. Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands?

He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: but ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.

And when he had called all the people unto him, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one of you, and understand: there is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear” (Mark 7:1-16).

The Greek word *corban* means “a consecrated present; something brought near the altar.” The Mosaic law required children to “honor” their parents—care for them in their various needs. Some of the Jews, however, concocted a scheme to avoid parental responsibility. They pronounced a part of their goods and money as *corban*, suggesting, “this belongs to God.” Thus, these assets could not be used for personal interest. According to tradition, this freed them of the

obligation—even if they retained their goods and money. The tradition of *corban* was in direct conflict with the law of Moses ([christiancourier.com/articles/1086-what-is-the-meaning-of-corban](http://christiancourier.com/articles/1086-what-is-the-meaning-of-corban), accessed July 18, 2014).

Your tradition can bring you “near” to the altar, even while you are totally missing the point of the altar. Tradition makes the Word of God have no effect, because your confidence is really in something else. Some people seem to think they have achieved something by attending a church service and singing a little bit. Their tradition is to attend a Pentecostal service. But if they are not Pentecostal from the inside out, their tradition is meaningless.

### **Acts 11:4-14**

“But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying, I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat. But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven. And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me. And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man’s house: and he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved” (Acts 11:4-14).

Peter’s defense to these men was basically, “I didn’t do this! Blame God.”

- *God* gave this vision to me (and did it three times).
- *God* sent His angel to Cornelius to tell him to send for me.
- *God* told me He sent the three servants of Cornelius to my house.

- *God* told me to go with the men, nothing doubting (“no disputing”).
- *God* prepared the hearts of Cornelius and his family to receive.

The only thing Peter did was to take six witnesses with him—and it’s a good thing he did because they never would have believed it otherwise.

Please notice that it was not Peter’s vision that resulted in the Gentiles coming into the church. Rather, the evidence of speaking in other tongues let everyone know it was God’s doing.

### **Acts 11:15-18**

“And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. 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? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:15-18).

Peter’s statement “as on us at the beginning” referred to Acts 2:4: “And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” Peter and the Jews knew the Gentiles had received the Holy Ghost because they heard the Gentiles speak in other tongues just as the Jews did on the Day of Pentecost.

Peter’s statement “then remembered I the word of the Lord” referred to Acts 1:5-8:

“For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to *Israel*? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:5-8, emphasis added).

Jesus had to remind them, “This is not about you” . . . and they still had made their Holy Ghost experience all about them. “The uttermost part of the earth” encompassed Gentiles as well as Jews and Samaritans.

Peter’s statement “God gave them the like gift as he did unto us” referred to speaking in tongues. With such clear evidence that God had given the Holy Ghost to the Gentiles, how could Peter withstand God?

Peter’s statement “repentance unto life” indicates that repentance is always the first step toward life.

Jesus promised the church power in Acts 1:8. The Holy Ghost was given primarily to empower an expansive evangelism effort that would affect their city and region (Judea) and then quickly expand to include a cross-cultural witness (Samaria) and – ultimately – a global presence. However, the narrative contained between Acts 1 and Acts 11 covers a period of more than ten years. During this time, the Jerusalem church was blessed with divine visitation, miracles of healing, and holy boldness – and they grew in spite of persecution, opposition, and even internal disputes. Their growth rate is impressive by any standard – three thousand people in Acts 2:41, five thousand men in Acts 4:4, multitudes of men and women in Acts 5:14, and even a great company of Jewish priests in Acts 6:7. *But it all happened inside Jerusalem.*

Jerusalem certainly enjoyed the rich blessings of the Lord during the church’s first decade, and many souls within her walls did come to salvation during that span of time. But what about the 99.9 percent of people in the world of their day who did not live in that one city? What about the other cultures that God specifically told them to reach? All of these issues beg us to answer a similar contemporary question: How many blessings does the church have to receive before she is ready and willing to fulfill wholeheartedly the Great Commission left by Jesus Christ?

One of the great dangers when we transition from a struggling, small congregation or movement to a successful, larger entity is that we tend to lose our cutting edge and even our dependence on God’s power. We become self-centered instead of God-centered, more reliant on human programs than biblical principles, and more focused on ease than on evangelism. In many of our conferences, camp meetings, conventions, and church services, the attention centers on our “Jerusalem” – that it may grow and prosper so that it may continue to minister to *us*. We have “received power” (the first promise of Acts

1:8) but we have not “become witnesses” (the second promise of Acts 1:8). And the second promise is more significant than the first, because the real test of any visitation of God is whether it results in evangelism. After all, Jesus commanded, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).

This issue was at the heart of a philosophical and spiritual battle within the early church. They started out in obedience to Acts 1:8, but stopped too soon. They wanted to reach out in Jerusalem—*among their own kind*—but they did not really want to go to the ends of the earth, or even to Samaria for that matter. The Jerusalem church needed a complete reversal in its thinking. They wanted God to “restore again the kingdom to Israel” (Acts 1:6) so they could sit in Jerusalem and have the nations come to them.

Nevertheless, Jesus wanted them to leave their comfort zone. A parable in Luke 14:23 reveals this: “And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.”

The seemingly natural desire of many Christians to stay within the warm confines of the church is not the will of God. On the contrary, He desires to lead us—even prod us and push us outside of our four walls—to become His witnesses in the world. Statistics show a nearly universal trend for Christians to disconnect from unsaved people the longer they are around the church.

However, that’s not the way Jesus or Paul did it. They were not isolationists; they were compelled to affect their culture with the gospel. Jesus said, “The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children” (Matthew 11:19). Paul stated, “To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (I Corinthians 9:22).

This is why God allowed the intense persecution led by Saul of Tarsus and the martyrdom of Stephen to shatter the church’s ten-year blissful harmony. Suddenly, disciples were being scattered everywhere. Nevertheless, while things grew worse in Jerusalem, great things were beginning to happen in Judea and even in Samaria. In one swift act of persecution, God had forced obedience on His church and compelled them to mobilize. Stephen’s death probably resulted in more obedience to the Great Commission than any other single event in the history of the early church and was even a major factor in the conversion of Paul.

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

God is not primarily committed to successful ministries or even great churches; He is primarily committed to the Great Commission. Thus, if we will not “go” (Mark 16:15), God only has two alternatives ...

- persecution, to drive us out, or
- substitution, to find someone else who will go willingly.

It was not that the Jerusalem church rejected the Great Commission outright; it is just that they could not seem to manage the kind of vision required during this period of church history. So God used persecution first (with some results) and then substitution when they continued to resist. Here is the firsthand account:

### **Acts 11:19-21**

“Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord” (Acts 11:19-21).

Antioch was a predominantly Gentile city, and it is *inconceivable* that the Christians who ended up preaching there should ignore all but a minuscule minority of Jews, assuming that they were the only ones God wanted to save. But that is exactly what they did, because their vision was limited only to the religious culture they already identified with. Thank God, a second group (from Cyprus and Cyrene, not Jerusalem) targeted their efforts to reach the Greek majority of Antioch’s population – *and the hand of the Lord was with them.*

When the church at Antioch was born was a moment of destiny. It was not just a few transplants from the Jerusalem Jewish subculture, but some sinfully irreverent, biblically illiterate Gentiles who came to know God. This

moment is why the Apostolics would soon be known as those who “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6) in the first century; this moment is why there is a church at all in the twenty-first century.

Jerusalem never did know how to deal with revolutionary revivalists like the apostle Paul, who continually jumped fences, ignored protocol, and broke tradition to win the lost. That’s why they sent him back to Tarsus to “cool off” when he first appeared in Jerusalem with wild tales of a life-changing encounter with God and wild ideas about evangelizing those pagan Gentiles. And that’s why Jerusalem never got to send out history’s greatest missionary – instead, that honor fell to the church in Antioch because they had a missionary heart.

### **Acts 11:22-26**

“Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: and when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. *And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch*” (Acts 11:22-26, emphasis added).

Thank God for Barnabas, who again had vision that others lacked. Although not one of the leaders, he was instrumental in bringing these Gentiles together with the apostle Paul – and the rest is history.

The Jerusalem church was unwilling to change to reach the culture of the world around it; instead, they demanded that the Gentiles essentially become Jewish before they could be saved. Sadly, the same thing happens today when churches insist that people speak their lingo, conform to their customs, like their music, agree with their politics, and observe a thousand unspoken traditions before they can “join the club.”

The Jerusalem church was richly blessed and doctrinally sound, but God still turned His attention to Antioch because Jerusalem would not embrace His

command to witness. Jerusalem held on to their resources and blessings, but Antioch accepted that God had the right to demand of them anything or anyone He wanted to use. They accepted that the Great Commission was at the very top of the Lord's priority list.

There are really only two New Testament church models, the Jerusalem church and the Antioch church. We must choose to be one or the other.

The renowned missionary C. T. Studd stated, "Some wish to live within the sound of church or chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell."

The greatest danger is always at the edge (where the church meets the culture). But so is the greatest opportunity for rescue and redemption. The New Testament church lived "on the edge" – never safe, always one step from disaster if God didn't intervene. Jude felt the tension:

"And of some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 22-24).

Many Apostolic people have gotten too comfortable with the status quo. Church has become a comfortable place, a place that is always the same . . . same friends, same events, same songs, same sermons, same faces, same size, same methods, and same results. That mentality is an affront to God, who called us to affect our culture with the gospel.

### **Acts 11:27-30**

"And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 11:27-30).



Antioch ended up blessing the Jerusalem church and pulling all the assemblies of the first century headlong into the Great Commission. Each of Paul's missionary journeys began and ended in Antioch.

Being missionary minded is not just sending money so someone can go overseas and minister to millions we do not know. A missionary-minded church is one concerned about the lost—both those next door and across the sea. Antioch was a great church because it sent forth Paul and Barnabas and also reached the Gentiles and Jews around it.

## What Have You Learned?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. What was the reaction of the apostles and brethren in Jerusalem to the news that the Gentiles had received the Holy Ghost?

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2. When faced with similar criticism as Peter, what did Jesus do?

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3. What is the meaning of *corban*? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. What was Peter's defense to the arguments against him?

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5. What evidence did Peter use to prove that the Gentiles had received the Holy Ghost? \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_
  
6. What is significant about the phrase “repentance unto life”?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
7. What are the two promises of Acts 1:8?  
A. \_\_\_\_\_  
B. \_\_\_\_\_
  
8. What is your “Jerusalem”? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
9. What was the result of Saul of Tarsus’s persecution of the church?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
10. Describe the church in Antioch. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Lesson 15

# Acts 12:1-13:13

### Recap

*Acts 11 contains a moment of destiny, when the church at Antioch was born. This moment is why Apostolics would soon be known as those who “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6) in the first century. It is why there is a church at all in the twenty-first century.*

*The Jerusalem church never got to send out history’s greatest missionary – that honor fell to the Antioch church because it had a missionary heart. As Acts 11:25-26 records, “Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: and when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch” (emphasis added).*

*The Jewish church in Jerusalem had sent Saul away. He was a radical and close to the Gentile people. He did not fit with their desire to maintain their Jewish-Christian culture. After the Holy Ghost fell on Cornelius’s household, Barnabas knew whom to contact. He knew God had placed His hand on Saul to minister to the Gentiles. Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Saul and then he took him to Antioch. For a year, Barnabas and Saul taught the people, and the church in Antioch grew.*

*Barnabas took Saul to Antioch instead of Jerusalem. The closed-minded church in Jerusalem still clung to its Jewish roots as steadfastly as it held to Peter’s message on the Day of Pentecost. The believers in Jerusalem ignored 99 percent of the world’s population and also Christ’s command to go into all the world. Antioch, on the other hand, caught the vision of a church open to all nationalities and ethnic groups. Believers became known*

*as Christians first in Antioch. They were the ones who sent the first missionaries to the Gentiles.*

*God is not committed to pastors, local assemblies, or religious institutions. He is committed to the Great Commission. If we do not go willingly and proclaim the gospel, either He will send persecution to goad us into going or He will bypass us and raise up substitutes to take our place – and our crown.*

## **Acts 12:1-4**

“Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people” (Acts 12:1-4).

The church was in great revival. It now included Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles. “About that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.” Herod’s actions should not have been a surprise. Great spiritual progress will always meet with opposition.

About the time you get an answer to prayer, about the time you decide to get more involved in the work of the Lord, about the time you experience a spiritual breakthrough, you can expect opposition from the devil. He always opposes spiritual progress.

The “Herod” mentioned in Acts 12:1 was the grandson of Herod the Great, who slaughtered the infants in Bethlehem, and the nephew of Herod Antipas, who beheaded John the Baptist.

James is called the “brother of John” to distinguish him from the other James, who is the author of the Epistle of James. He was the first of the apostles to suffer death; his brother John was the last. Notice what Mark wrote about James and John:

“And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire. And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory. But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: but to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared. And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John” (Mark 10:35-41).

Jesus’ statement, “Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of,” was prophetic of James’s martyrdom. They wanted glory and honor but Jesus offered something much different.

Acts 12 records Peter’s third imprisonment. Herod did not want to take any chance on him simply disappearing as before. He had four quaternions (sixteen soldiers) guarding Peter. Bound with two chains, Peter slept between two guards. Two other soldiers guarded the door. Herod planned to bring Peter before the people after Passover (“after Easter”) and wanted to be sure he did not escape.

## Questions

The events in the first twelve chapters of Acts pose interesting questions:

- Why was Stephen stoned to death but Paul was stoned to death and miraculously raised up to continue his ministry?
- Why was Philip supernaturally transported to witness to one soul while Paul had to travel thousands of weary miles to preach?
- Why were Peter and other apostles delivered by angels out of jail while Paul was left to die in prison, writing letters to the churches?
- Why did God raise Dorcas from the dead and not Stephen?

- Why did God let James be beheaded and yet send an angel to deliver Peter the same night he was to be beheaded from that same prison?

I don't know the answers. Only God knows. I simply know that God is sovereign. I don't know why some things happen the way they do. Nevertheless, I know that God does *all* things well. As Jerry Bridges said in *Trusting God Even When Life Hurts*, "God in His love always wills what is best for us. In His wisdom He always knows what is best, and in His sovereignty He has the power to bring it about" (Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God Even When Life Hurts*, Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1988.)

Job also had questions without answers. Nevertheless, he said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15a). Job also said, "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth" (Job 19:25). God wants men and women to serve him without reservation, having complete trust in Him. We do not have to understand God's ways. We simply have to trust Him and obey.

## **Acts 12:5-11**

"Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and

hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews” (Acts 12:5-11).

Luke reported, “But prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.” The setbacks the church had experienced did not stop the believers from praying, and this time their prayer became the turning point. Thomas Watson, a Puritan preacher, observed, “The angel fetched Peter out of prison, but it was prayer that fetched the angel.”

Peter’s sleeping soundly—even though he was to be executed the next day—demonstrated his confidence in God. He knew that the throne in Heaven was in control, not the throne on earth. God was and is in charge.

In praying, we must remember that God is always in charge. It’s His good pleasure to give us the Kingdom. But God also knows that some things that we ask for are not good for us. A good parent will refuse to give a child anything that would harm him or her. Likewise, God, being a better parent than we could ever be, answers our prayers according to His will and His purpose. Because of His unfailing and boundless love for us, because of His omnipotence, because of His sovereignty, and because of His infinite wisdom, we can trust God to do what is best for us and His church.

Peter said, “The Lord hath . . . delivered me out of the hand of Herod.” The Greek word translated *delivered* in Acts 12:11 is the same word Stephen used to describe the Exodus in Acts 7:34.

## **Acts 12:12-19**

“And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. And when she knew Peter’s voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished. But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought

him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place. Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and there abode" (Acts 12:12-19).

How many times do we pray without expecting an answer? The believers had gathered and prayed without ceasing for Peter's release. Yet they did not expect it to happen, for they were astonished when he knocked on the door. Instead of believing it was Peter knocking, they accepted the popular superstition that his guardian angel had assumed Peter's form.

Modern Apostolics sometimes act like those at the prayer meeting at Mary's house. When God sends the answer to our prayers, we refuse to recognize it. When we pray to draw closer to the Lord or pray for lost loved ones and the Lord sends trials and hardships, we shrink back and wonder how this can be. However, He knows that trials will make us depend on Him. He knows that adversity will cause our loved ones to reach out to Him.

The B. J. Phillips translation of James 1:2 says that when trials come knocking at our door, we should welcome and embrace them as dear friends. When God's answer to our prayer stands knocking on our door, we should give God the glory instead of saying "this can't be." Embracing the answer is a sign of our faith and trust in God.

## **Acts 12:20-25**

"And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country. And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. But the word of God grew and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem,



when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark” (Acts 12:20-25).

The men of Tyre and Sidon were good politicians and decided to gain the favor of Herod through flattery. Herod assembled the masses and made a moving speech. In blatant flattery, the crowd proclaimed it was the voice of a god. Because Herod delighted in the honor and failed to give honor to God, the Lord smote him. Herod had dared to lift his hand against the church, now his words were stilled forever. Nevertheless, the Word grew and multiplied.

Herod’s death showed once again that God controls the affairs of men and nations. Nebuchadnezzar was forced to realize this in Daniel 4: “This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men” (Daniel 4:17).

The statement “Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem” alludes to their taking an offering to the elders in Jerusalem. Barnabas’s cousin, John Mark, accompanied them on their return trip. (See Acts 11:29-30; Colossians 4:10.)

### **Acts 13:1-3**

“Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away” (Acts 13:1-3).

Until now, Jerusalem had been the center of ministry, and Peter had been the key apostle. However, from this point on, Antioch became the new center of evangelism and Paul the key apostle. The gospel was on the move into the Gentile world. The Antioch church sent out history’s first missionaries in Acts 13-14. In these two chapters, Luke described Paul’s ministry in several cities in the ancient world.

Missions is not a sideline of the church. The church must be a missionary-believing, a missionary-raising, a missionary-funding, a missionary-sending, and a missionary-praying body of believers fully committed to the Great Commission. Missions is not one of our programs. Missions is the heartbeat of any New Testament church.

## **Acts 13:4-12**

“So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister. And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus: which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, and said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord” (Acts 13:4-12).

The second stop on their missionary journey was Cyprus, the homeland of Barnabas. Acts 4:36 states, “And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus” (Acts 4:36).

In Salamis, Cyprus, they went to the Jewish synagogue and preached Jesus. Preaching Jesus first in the synagogue was Paul’s custom. If the Jews did not respond, he went on to the Gentiles. Paul declared in Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”

Acts 13:9 is the first place we find the name Paul in the New Testament. As a Roman citizen, the apostle's full name was probably "Saul Paulus," for many Jews had both Jewish and Roman names.

Sergius Paulus was the deputy of the island and desired to hear the Word of God. However, Elymas the sorcerer – who was a Jewish false prophet named Barjesus – tried to prevent the deputy from believing. When Paul saw what was happening, he pronounced God's judgment on the false prophet. Immediately the man was blind and sought for someone to lead him. Because of the miracle, Sergius Paulus "believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord."

## **Acts 13:13**

"Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem" (Acts 13:13).

When the missionaries arrived on Cyprus, they were "Barnabas and Saul." As the anointing became more evident on Paul's ministry and after a few miracles, the missionary troop became known as "Paul and his company." Barnabas stepped back and allowed Paul to take the lead. Barnabas had the spirit of John the Baptist, who said, "He must increase, I must decrease."

Without Barnabas's going and seeking Paul out and then becoming his mentor, Paul would have remained in Tarsus. Barnabas could have become resentful as his star dimmed and Paul's shown brighter. However, Barnabas had no bitterness. He willingly stepped back and allowed Paul to take center stage. A man of great humility and compassion, Barnabas is one of the unsung heroes of the New Testament church.

## **What Have You Learned?**

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. Where were the believers first called Christians?
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2. According to the lesson, what is God committed to?

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3. Which Herod is mentioned in Acts 12:1?

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4. As of Acts 12, how many times had Peter been in prison?

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5. What did James and John ask of Jesus?

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6. How many soldiers guarded Peter? Why?

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7. How do we know that Peter had complete trust in God?

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8. What did the believers do when Peter was imprisoned the third time?

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9. Why did Rhoda delay in opening the door for Peter?

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10. What was the result of Herod accepting the praise of the men from Tyre and Sidon? \_\_\_\_\_

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11. What was Paul's usual custom in evangelizing a city or town?

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12. Why did Barnabas and Paul stop in Cyprus?

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13. Describe Barnabas's character.

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14. Identify

- A. Sergius Paulus \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Elymas \_\_\_\_\_
- C. John Mark \_\_\_\_\_
- D. James, the brother of John \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Stephen \_\_\_\_\_
- F. Herod the Great \_\_\_\_\_



## Lesson 16

# Acts 13:14-13:52

### Recap

*The Antioch church was blessed to be where disciples were first called Christians, to be the center of revival, and to send out history's first missionaries in Acts 13-14. The Jerusalem church, on the other hand, had pedigree and history on its side. It also had true doctrine and great experience. However, the Jewish believers in Jerusalem never had the vision that would have allowed them to leave their little corner of culture and go to the 99.9 percent of the then known world who wanted and needed God.*

*Consequently, Antioch became the model for the New Testament church. It was the center for evangelism and sent out the first missionaries in Acts 13:1-3. They did not go out into Greek culture to be like that culture but to change that culture. The mission of the church has not changed in two thousand years.*

*In Acts 13-14, Luke described the ministry of Paul in several cities on his first missionary journey. By this point in the Book of Acts, Antioch had become the central church, and Paul had become the central character. That's why "Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 13:2) now became "Paul and his company." (Barnabas had been Saul's mentor. However, he had the spirit of John the Baptist, who said, "He must increase; I must decrease.")*

*Acts 13:13 states, "Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem." The team had been on the island of Cyprus, but as soon as they got back to the mainland, John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem.*

***Why did John Mark desert his friends?***

- *Was he simply homesick?*
- *Was he uncomfortable among Gentile Christians?*
- *Was he afraid of the dangers they were facing?*
- *Was he unhappy Paul was leading instead of his cousin Barnabas?*
- *We don't know any more at this point ...*

## **Acts 13:14-22**

“But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down. And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on. Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience. The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it. And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness. And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan, he divided their land to them by lot. And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years. And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will”(Acts 13:14-22).

Entering Antioch in Pisidia, Paul and his company went to the synagogue on the Sabbath. This was in keeping with his custom of taking the gospel to the Jews first. (See Romans 1:16.) After the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the ruler of the synagogue gave Paul opportunity to address the assembly.

Since Paul was addressing a synagogue congregation, he used Jewish history and customs to establish common ground with them—Egyptian bondage, the Exodus, the judges, King Saul, and King David—and used the Old Testament Scriptures to support his arguments. In just a few sentences, he covered hundreds of years of Jewish history.



King Saul was a disaster. What a contrast to King David, of whom the Lord said, "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart." Would to God that we all would have the testimony that we were men and women after God's own heart.

### **Acts 13:23-33**

"Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus: when John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John fulfilled his course, he said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not he. But, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose. Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre. But God raised him from the dead: and he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people. And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee" (Acts 13:23-33).

Paul used David as a bridge to Jesus. In just a few sentences, he went from slavery in Egypt to King David to David's seed, Jesus the Savior. In Acts 13:33 he quoted Psalm 2:7: "I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee."

Paul did not waste any time in getting to the point of his message, Jesus. John preached the baptism of repentance, but John confessed that he was not the Messiah. He said one was coming after him and he was not worthy even to loosen his sandals. Then Paul declared that the word of salvation came to the Jews, but because "they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers . . . knew him

not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him." Paul who had been one of the chief persecutors of the Christians now accused the Jews of failing to recognize their Messiah and of condemning Him to death without cause.

Paul further declared that Jesus was laid in a tomb but did not stay there. God raised Jesus Christ from the dead and He "was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people."

In Acts 13:33 he quoted Psalm 2:7: "I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." Many people think this refers to the birth of the Babe in Bethlehem. However, the context of the verse makes it clear that Jesus was begotten from the dead. Paul was not referring to a virgin womb but to a virgin tomb, for Jesus did not stay. As a song by Charles Bell and Zane King says,

"He was just changing clothes for a journey  
then He left that old ugly room  
Death and the grave lost its victory  
in a borrowed and barely used tomb."

John the Revelator declared, "And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood" (Revelation 1:5). Jesus Christ is the first begotten of the dead. Because He lives, we are also alive in the Spirit.

### **Acts 13:34-43**

"And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: but he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption. Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are

justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you. And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath. Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God" (Acts 13:34-43).

"The sure mercies of David" is a quote from Isaiah 55:3: "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." God had promised David that from him the Messiah would come. Because of his sin, David wasn't worthy of this promise – but God gave him *sure mercies*.

"Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption" is a quote from Psalm 16:10: "For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." Paul quoted the same Messianic prophecy that Peter quoted in his message on the Day of Pentecost. It was clear that it couldn't apply to David, who was dead, buried, and decayed. Nevertheless, it did apply to Jesus.

Jesus died, but He arose victorious over sin and death. Because He is alive, those that believe in Him are justified, which could never be done through the law of Moses.

Paul also quoted Habakkuk 1:5: "Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you." Paul quoted this verse of Scripture to warn the Jews, lest while God is beginning to work marvelously among the Gentiles, they would miss out on it. Through this declaration, Paul attacked the cynicism of Jewish religion, which had become mere ritual and form in the first century. They no longer believed in miracles and were in no way ready to receive the Messiah.

Christians in the twenty-first century also need to be aware lest cynicism creeps into the church of the living God. Cynical Christians go through the motions and rituals but do not believe Jesus can perform miracles.

Their skepticism, however, has not changed Jesus. He is still alive and well and as powerful and miraculous as when He walked on earth. He is the one who said He would build His church and He is doing it! Signs and miracles still follow those that believe.

Paul and company did everything they could to get the Jews to accept the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Jews were the ones with the Scriptures. They had the spiritual pedigree. They had history and experience. And they walked out of the synagogue unmoved.

The Gentiles in Antioch of Pisidia, on the other hand, were so spiritually hungry that they were begging for the Word. "And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath." Paul went to the Jews first with the message of salvation. The pagan Gentiles, however, pleaded with Paul to repeat the message to them the following Sunday. What contrast between the ones with the religious advantage and those who have been in darkness and without hope.

### **Acts 13:44-52**

*"And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 13:44:52).*

The Jews rejected the gospel but were envious that God was moving among the Gentiles. Instead of rejoicing in what God was doing, the Jews resented God blessing the Gentiles. They contradicted and blasphemed the message of Paul. Their actions vividly fulfilled Jesus' statement in Matthew 23:13: "But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in."

Because it was "necessary," Paul and Barnabas first took the gospel to the Jews. However, since the Jews had rejected the message, Paul and his company turned to the Gentiles. The Jews in turn stirred up trouble and persecution for the disciples.

Likewise, Jesus said, "And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrhah in the day of judgment, than for that city" (Mark 6:11).

"And the disciples were filled with joy." There will always be opposition, but we can rejoice in what God is doing regardless.

## What Have You Learned?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. What city did Paul enter after leaving Perga? Where is the city located?

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2. Where did Paul go on the Sabbath Day?

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3. Why did Paul give a summary of Jewish history?

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4. What did Paul use as evidence to support his statements regarding Jesus?

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5. What was God's testimony concerning David?

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6. What was the main point of Paul's message to the Jews in the synagogue?

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7. Explain the significance of "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee."

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8. What are "the sure mercies of David"?

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9. Name two prophets that Paul quoted in this message to the Jews in the synagogue.

A. \_\_\_\_\_

B. \_\_\_\_\_

10. What was Paul's response to the Jews rejecting his message?

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11. Describe the attitude of the Jews, the Gentiles, and the disciples following Paul's preaching on "the next sabbath day."

Jews: \_\_\_\_\_

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Gentiles: \_\_\_\_\_

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Disciples: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Personal Study Notes**



## Lesson 17

# Acts 14:1-15:18

### Recap

*In Acts 13 the emphasis shifted from the church in Jerusalem to the church in Antioch. For more than a decade, the church in Jerusalem evangelized only the Jews. This was the “mother” church that had great revival and pure doctrine. However, it lacked desire to reach out to other ethnic groups. In contrast, the Antioch church had a burden and vision to fulfil the Great Commission. The Antioch church was blessed to send out the first Christian missionaries on their first missionary journey in Acts 13-14.*

*At this point in the Book of Acts, God was beginning to work marvelously among the Gentiles. In Antioch of Pisidia, they were so spiritually hungry that they literally begged Paul and Barnabas to preach the Word of God to them. But the Jews, who had history and heritage on their side, became envious of what God was doing. Consequently, “then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46).*

*Paul’s decision to go to the Gentiles was in keeping with his own principle. He wrote in Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” The gospel is for everyone who believes. Paul first went to the Jews. When the Jews rejected the gospel, he turned to the Gentiles.*

*God always turns to those with spiritual hunger over those that have a spiritual pedigree but no appetite for the things of God. We may be as spiritually ignorant and confused as the pagan Gentiles, but God will come to us if we have godly desire. May we all hunger and thirst after righteousness.*

*The unbelieving Jews did not approve of Paul turning to the Gentiles. They stirred up so much persecution against Paul and Barnabas that they succeeded in expelling them out of the region. That brought the missionaries to Iconium, where the same thing happened all over again.*

### **Acts 14:1-7**

“And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, they were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: and there they preached the gospel” (Acts 14:1-7).

Persecution by the “unbelieving Jews” followed the missions team, because truth always divides. Such was the case in Iconium. A part of the city sided with the apostles, the other part with the Jews. Both the Jews and Gentiles assaulted Paul and his company. However, even when they had to flee from persecution, it didn’t stop them from preaching the gospel.

### **Acts 14:8-18**

“And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother’s womb, who never had walked: the same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked. And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius,

because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people. Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them" (Acts 14:8-18).

The miraculous healing of the lame man in Lystra is similar to the healing of the lame man in Acts 3 by Peter and Paul. Miracles are not given to make us follow men. Miracles happen to show the power of the name of Jesus and for God to receive all glory. In no way should miracles lead to the veneration of a place or the worship of a man. All praise should go to the source of the miracle, God alone.

However, the superstitious crowd in Lystra interpreted events through their own mythology. They saw Barnabas as Jupiter (Zeus), chief of the gods; and Paul, the speaker, as Mercury (Hermes), messenger of the gods. Jupiter was the patron deity of the city, so this allowed the priest to feel important. Paul could have tried to use this "honor" to lead people to truth, but Apostolics don't use lies to promote truth. Paul and Barnabas opposed what they were doing and boldly told the people that their gods were "vanities."

When Paul had addressed synagogue congregations, he used Jewish history to establish common ground with them, and then used the Old Testament Scriptures to support his arguments. In Lystra, however, Paul did not base his message on the Old Testament because his audience was pagan Gentiles. He started with the witness of God in creation: "He left not himself without witness." The starting point was different, but the ending point was the same.

Once again, the jealous Jews followed the missionaries, even stoning Paul and leaving him for dead. It's amazing that Paul then returned home through the same cities where they had experienced such persecution.

## Acts 14:19-25

“And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia” (Acts 14:19-25).

Again, persecution followed the apostles. Jews who had opposed them in Antioch and Iconium followed the group and stirred up the persecution. The Jews stoned Paul and left, assuming he was dead. The disciples prayed, and Paul arose.

Because of the persecution, the group traveled on to Derbe. After teaching many in Derbe, Paul and his company retraced their steps, going from Derbe, to Lystra, to Iconium, to Antioch of Pisidia. The disciples encouraged the believers, “exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” In each city, Paul ordained elders to lead the churches.

In summary, on their return trip to Antioch, the team did several important things:

- They made disciples (“taught many”).
- They strengthened the believers (“confirming the souls”).
- They encouraged them to continue in the faith (“exhorting them”).
- They told them to expect trials (“through much tribulation”).
- They appointed elders in every church (“ordained them elders”).

## **Acts 14:26-28**

“And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they abode long time with the disciples” (Acts 14:26-28).

Finally, they reported to their “sending church” on the great work God had done. They had been gone at least a full year. They did not moan and complain about their persecutions and hardship. Instead, they testified of how Gentiles were entering the churches and of the door of faith God had opened unto them. This shows us the critical importance of accountability to the local or sending church. Antioch was not a parking lot, but a launching pad for Paul.

A statement made by Bob Pierce, an evangelist with Youth for Christ, who later founded World Vision, can be applied to the Jews and Gentiles: “Others have done so much with so little, while we have done so little with so much.” The Jews had heritage and history, prophets and priests on their side but failed to grasp their significance regarding the gospel. The Gentiles, on the other hand, had nothing—no Tabernacle, no covenant, no Law. They had never heard of a rabbi, of Jehovah, or of Jesus. However, they readily accepted the gospel when it was preached unto them.

## **Acts 15:1-6**

“And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees

which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter" (Acts 15:1-6).

The door of faith had now opened wide to the Gentiles, and the legalistic Jews didn't like it. In Acts 15, twenty years after the Day of Pentecost, the church had to act decisively to keep that door open. Jewish Christians had come from Jerusalem to Antioch to undermine the teachings of Paul and Barnabas. The church was at a strategic crossroad.

God had given the law of circumcision to Abraham more than four hundred years before Moses (Genesis 17:9-14), with no specific instruction other than doing it on the eighth day. To that basic commandment, the Jews had added many rules; as Jesus said, they taught as commandments the tradition of men (Mark 7:9). This is why they were concerned that circumcision be done "after the manner [i.e., detailed procedures] of Moses."

"And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition" (Mark 7:9).

The Jews were insisting that Gentile converts must become Jews first before they were even allowed to become Christians ("ye cannot be saved"). Circumcision was just an excuse to push their real agenda – that Gentiles should be forced to keep the whole Jewish law (v. 5).

### **WHY WAS THIS SO DANGEROUS?**

- It mixed Law and grace.
- It tried to pour new wine into old wineskins.
- It stitched up the rent veil, blocking the new and living way to God.
- It rebuilt the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile, which the cross had torn down.
- It put a heavy Jewish yoke on Gentile shoulders.
- It asked the church to move out of the sunlight back into the shadows.
- It demanded that Gentiles become Jews before they could be saved.
- It said that obedience to the gospel is not enough.

The apostles and elders of the church gathered in Jerusalem to discuss the matter not because Jerusalem was their "headquarters," but because Jewish

“Christians” out of Jerusalem created this problem. (Paul later called them “false brethren” in Galatians 2:4.)

Acts 15 cites three main speeches from this meeting: Peter’s in Acts 15:7-11, Barnabas and Paul’s in Acts 15:12, and James’s in Acts 15:13-18.

### **Acts 15:7-11: Peter**

“And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they” (Acts 15:7-11).

The Jews had never learned that the “commandments [of the Lord] are not grievous” (I John 5:3). They had never realized the “beauty of holiness” (II Chronicles 20:21). They had never considered the blessings that came upon them because of their obedience to the Law. (See Deuteronomy 28.) Instead, they considered the Law as a burden to endure and wanted the Gentiles to feel its weight. The Jews were unable to keep the Mosaic law, so Peter asked, “Why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples?”

### **Acts 15:12: Barnabas and Paul**

“Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them” (Acts 15:12).

### **Acts 15:13-18: James**

Peter, Barnabas, and Paul gave testimony of what God had been doing among the Gentiles. James anchored their testimony to the Word.

“And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon [Simon Peter] hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:13-18).

What happened at Cornelius’s household through the ministry of Peter (“Simeon”) was not just about one family; God was beginning to visit the entire Gentile race “to take out of them a people for his name.” James said it had always been God’s will for the Gentiles to be in His church. He quoted the Jewish prophet Amos to support his argument.

“In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this” (Amos 9:11-12).

On the Day of Pentecost, when the Jews came into the church, Peter quoted Joel. Now, as the Gentiles came in, James quoted Amos.

At one point in Israel’s history, there were *two tabernacles* in existence at the same time – the Tabernacle of Moses in Mount Gibeon and the Tabernacle of David in Mount Zion.

“So Solomon, and all the congregation with him, went to the high place that was at Gibeon; for there was the tabernacle of the congregation of God, which Moses the servant of the LORD had made in the wilderness. But the ark of God had David brought up from Kirjath-jearim to the place which David had prepared for it: for he had pitched a tent for it at Jerusalem” (II Chronicles 1:3-4).



Once it was taken out of the Tabernacle of Moses during the reign of Saul, the Ark of the Covenant never returned to that building (the glory had departed). Instead, David brought the Ark back to Jerusalem and set it in a tent, the Tabernacle of David. The Tabernacle of Moses had an empty Holy of Holies, but the Tabernacle of David had a new order of worship (“sacrifices of praise”) all centered around the Ark.

At the Tabernacle of David, common men and women could come and see the Ark, the symbol of God’s presence. The veil no longer hid the Ark. The Gentiles were to come into the Tabernacle of David, not the Tabernacle of Moses. Access to the Ark is still available – because the door is still open to “all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD.”

## What Have You Learned?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. Describe the reaction to Paul’s preaching in Iconium.

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2. Whom did the people of Lystra think Paul and Barnabas were?

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3. What did Paul use to establish common ground when preaching in the Jewish synagogue in Lystra? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. What is the purpose of miracles?

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5. List five cities that Paul preached in as cited in Acts 14.
  - A. \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. \_\_\_\_\_
  - D. \_\_\_\_\_
  - E. \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. Why did Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
7. Name five things the apostles did on their return trip to Antioch.
  - A. \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. \_\_\_\_\_
  - D. \_\_\_\_\_
  - E. \_\_\_\_\_
  
8. How many years after the Day of Pentecost did the council in Jerusalem take place? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
9. Why was the issue of circumcision important to the church?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
10. Cite five dangerous things that would have occurred if the Gentile Christians were required to keep the Jewish laws.
  - A. \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. \_\_\_\_\_
  - D. \_\_\_\_\_
  - E. \_\_\_\_\_

11. What Old Testament prophet did James quote to prove it was God's will for the Gentiles to be a part of the church?

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12. Why were there two tabernacles during the reign of David?

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13. What was the difference between the two tabernacles?

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14. What is the significance of the Tabernacle of David?

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15. What was Peter's main argument against requiring the Gentiles to be circumcised?

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16. What was Barnabas and Paul's main evidence against requiring the Gentiles to be circumcised?

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17. What was James's main argument against requiring the Gentiles to undergo circumcision? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Lesson 18

# Acts 15:19-41

### Recap

*The door of faith had opened wide to the Gentiles, and the legalistic Jews didn't like it. They insisted that Gentile converts must become Jews first, before they were allowed to become Christians. In Acts 15, twenty years after the Day of Pentecost, the church had to act decisively to keep that door open. Peter, Barnabas, and Paul gave testimony of what God had been doing among the Gentiles. James then anchored their testimony to the Word and gave his recommendation.*

*“And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:13-18).*

*After everyone had said what they had to say, James quoted the Old Testament prophet Amos to show that God had always intended for Gentiles to be a part of the church: “In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this” (Amos 9:11-12).*

*At one point in Israel's history – and only at this one instance – two tabernacles existed at the same time: the Tabernacle of Moses in Mount Gibeon and the Tabernacle of*

*David in Mount Zion. Of these two tabernacles, II Chronicles 1:3-4 states, "So Solomon, and all the congregation with him, went to the high place that was at Gibeon; for there was the tabernacle of the congregation of God, which Moses the servant of the LORD had made in the wilderness. But the ark of God had David brought up from Kirjath-jearim to the place which David had prepared for it: for he had pitched a tent for it at Jerusalem."*

*David brought the Ark back to Jerusalem and set it in an open tent, the Tabernacle of David. The Tabernacle of Moses had an empty Holy of Holies, but the Tabernacle of David had a new order of worship ("sacrifices of praise") all centered around the Ark. The common people could now see the Ark; it was no longer hidden behind the veil where only the high priest could go once a year. The Gentiles were to come into the Tabernacle of David, not the Tabernacle of Moses. Access to the Ark is still available because the door is still open.*

*The Tabernacle of David symbolizes that the way to the presence of God is open to all. Barriers to His glory no longer exist in the New Testament church. Now every person may boldly enter into intimacy with God.*

## **Acts 15:19-21**

*"Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: but that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day" (Acts 15:19-21).*

James concluded that the Gentiles

- *did not* have to become Jews to become Christians.
- *did not* have to come to God through the Jewish worship system.
- *did* have to leave behind their pagan Gentile worship system.

These things had always been "preached by Moses" – but in their ignorance of the things God, the Gentiles didn't know that.

The four "commandments" James gave were certainly not the only dictates that the Gentiles would have to obey – that would be a ridiculous idea in light of the eternal moral law of God and in light of the rest of the New Testament. Rather,

they were a “crash course” in the laws of God that spoke specifically against pagan worship. The Gentiles were required to abstain from

- pollutions of idols – sacrifices made to images in pagan temples;
- fornication – prostitutes and sexual rites in pagan temple worship;
- things strangled – considered the “food of demons” in pagan rituals (according to Origen, an early church father);
- blood – drinking blood (of sacrifices or even victims) in pagan rituals.

### **Acts 15:22-27**

“Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: and they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: it seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth” (Acts 15:22-27).

The disciples penned their decision concerning circumcision and the Law and chose Judas and Silas to accompany Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch. The letter clarified that the church in Jerusalem did not authorize the men who taught the necessity of circumcision. Of these false teachers, John would later write, “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us” (I John 2:19). Similarly Paul would write, “And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you” (Galatians 2:4-5).

In essence the council in Jerusalem said, “We’re not asking for Gentiles to become Jews in order to become Christians – but we are asking you to leave your old Gentile lifestyle. Christian worship is not like your old pagan worship.”

### **Acts 15:28-35**

“For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well. So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation. And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them. And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles. Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still. Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also” (Acts 15:28-35).

The letter voiced that the Gentiles were only required to do the things necessary for them to enter the church. (As they matured in Christ, they would automatically do and not do other things.) The Gentiles were to abstain from pagan practices such as

- meats offered to idols,
- blood,
- things strangled,
- fornication.

What the first-century church was really wrestling with in Acts 15 was the question, “Who is the church for?”

The natural “gravitational pull” of every church congregation is toward *insiders (us)* rather than *outsiders (them)*. We have to guard against that. Churches that decide they are all about *keeping* the already saved (*us*) never get too concerned about *reaching* the unsaved (*them*). That’s wrong.



Churches designed for church people are full of hypocrites, because we have to be hypocrites to participate. Transparency and honesty are dangerous in a church for church people, so we become good at covering up our issues to keep in everyone else's good books. We're fine if we attend services, dress correctly, pay our tithes, and wrap our righteous robes around us.

The casualty of a church just for insiders is *grace*.

On the other end of the spectrum are those who declare that church is for everyone, regardless of belief or behavior. These churches value openness and tolerance more than they value obedience and truth. They end up picking which parts of the Bible they wish to embrace. They open the doors wide and embrace all lifestyles and all doctrines.

The casualty of a church just for outsiders is *truth*.

What in the world do we do to manage the tension of this very difficult balancing act? We do what the first-century church did. And even more important, we do exactly what Jesus modeled in His earthly ministry.

Jesus was full of grace *and* truth. He didn't try to "balance" between them; He was the full embodiment of *both* of them. John stated,

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. . . . For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:14, 17).

It's easy to create an *all-truth* church model. It is based on extreme Pentecostal orthodoxy and has lists of dos and don'ts. It may be even easier to create an *all-grace* church model. This can be done by embracing all lifestyles and all ideologies. However, Jesus didn't leave either of those options open to us—we must be a *grace and truth* church.

Consider the woman taken in the act of adultery. After Jesus wrote on the ground, her accusers departed. "When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:10-11).

Her own guilt and shame convicted her; Jesus offered forgiveness. He showed her grace and love. Nevertheless, He did not compromise truth. His directive to “sin no more” acknowledged that she had sin—and could have been stoned under the Law. In love, Jesus was willing to accept her as she was, but He was not willing for her to remain in her sinful condition. His grace came to forgive and to teach her a better way. (See Titus 2:11-13.)

One translation of James’s statement clarifies the goal of the church: “And so my judgment is that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God” (Acts 15:19, NLT). The church should make it as easy as possible for all people to come to God and then to grow in Him.

### **Acts 15:36-41**

“And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; and Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches” (Acts 15:36-41).

Paul suggested that he and Barnabas make another missionary journey to check on the converts from their first journey. Barnabas was agreeable to the trip, but he again wanted to take his cousin John Mark with them. Paul refused to allow John Mark to go because he had deserted them once before (Acts 13:13). The contention between Paul and Barnabas became so sharp that they parted ways and even picked new ministry partners.

Who was right? It doesn’t matter. God now had two missionary teams. Paul took Silas and traveled north and west into Syria and Cilicia while Barnabas departed with Mark back to the island of Cyprus, his home country.

Years later in his last epistle, however, Paul let everyone know that his opinion of John Mark had changed dramatically: “Only Luke is with me. Take

Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry” (II Timothy 4:11). Consequently, someone else’s opinion of you—even a leader’s opinion—is not the final word on your life. Keep a good attitude and stay faithful.

## What Have You Learned?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. From what four things did James determine the Gentiles should abstain?
  - A. \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. \_\_\_\_\_
  - D. \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. Who did the elders send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
3. What instructions did the false teachers from Jerusalem give to the believers in Antioch?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
4. The natural “gravitational pull” of every church is to what group? Why?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
5. What are characteristics of an “insiders’ church”?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. What are characteristics of an “outsiders’ church”?

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7. What is the casualty of an “insiders’ church”?

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8. What is the casualty of an “outsiders’ church”?

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9. Why did Paul want to make another missionary journey?

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10. What was the contention between Paul and Barnabas?

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11. What was the result of the contention between Paul and Barnabas?

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## Lesson 19

# Acts 16:1-17:34

### Recap

*“And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do” (Acts 15:36).*

*Not long after the “church council” in Jerusalem, Paul set out on his second missionary journey to revisit and strengthen the churches. He ended up traveling with Silas, not Barnabas, due to a disagreement about taking John Mark with them. Consequently, two missionary groups departed from Antioch. Barnabas and John Mark sailed west to Cyprus, while Paul and Silas journeyed north and west into Syria and Cilicia.*

### Acts 16:1-5

*“Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek. And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily” (Acts 16:1-5).*

Paul later wrote that Timothy was a third-generation Apostolic: “When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also” (II Timothy 1:5). Timothy was “well reported of” among the local believers. Timothy had proved his ministry locally before he began to travel with Paul. In keeping with the apostolic mode, his local church sent him out. Paul later instructed Timothy, “Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery” (I Timothy 4:14).

Part of their assignment on this journey was to deliver the “decrees” from the elders in Jerusalem to all the churches. Remember:

- Those decrees stated that the Gentiles should not have to become Jews (and be circumcised) before they could become Christians. Thank God that we Gentiles do not have to learn Hebrew, be concerned about blood sacrifices, or follow the minutia of the Law.
- Paul had steadfastly refused to have Titus circumcised. In writing to the church at Galatia, Paul stated, “But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised” (Galatians 2:3).
- Paul had said that circumcision was not of any spiritual benefit. Later in his letter to the Galatians, Paul wrote, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature” (Galatians 6:15).

So why now did he have Timothy circumcised? Isn’t that inconsistent?

Not at all! Titus was a pure Greek, but Timothy was half-Jewish (“his father was a Greek”). The Judaizers were trying to pressure Titus to become Jewish, but Timothy was already a practicing Jew. So Timothy’s circumcision was not motivated by pressure from inside the church, but by a missionary strategy outside the church. Timothy was circumcised only so he would not offend the Jews they were trying to reach.

Consider what Paul wrote to the saints in Corinth:

“For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law

to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you" (I Corinthians 9:19-23).

In the twenty-first century, many people are offended by any little thing that is asked of them, something that would please the Lord or remove a stumbling block for someone else. Not so in the first century. They willingly did anything and everything to please God and win others for the gospel.

I want to be a first-century church in the twenty-first century. I want to have the spirit that says nothing is too hard or too great or too much to do for the gospel's sake.

## **Acts 16:6-10**

"Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, after they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; there stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them" (Acts 16:6-10).

Notice the language here: "forbidden of the Holy Ghost" and "the Spirit suffered them not." They were waiting on God for direction, really just feeling their way along until they got a "green light" from the Lord—just like us, because they were just normal people sold out to God.

If you do not know what to do, just wait on the Lord for direction. The prophet Isaiah said, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength" (Isaiah 40:31). The disciples waited and prayed until they felt right about direction for their ministry. If you are looking for direction for your life, stay the course until God says to change.

Paul received instructions through a vision of a man of Macedonia, who “prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.” Immediately the band made plans to enter into Europe. Can you imagine how history might have been changed if Paul had continued ministering in Asia only and not followed this vision into Europe?

Here are two technical notes at this point that will help you as you read Acts:

1. Verse 10 says “after he . . . immediately we.” When Luke says “we,” it tells us that he had joined the missionary party at that point.
2. Several of the cities referred to in Acts contained churches to which Paul later wrote epistles. It is very informative to read those epistles simultaneously with Acts (i.e., Philippi/Philippians).

## **Acts 16:11-15**

“Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; and from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days. And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us” (Acts 16:11-15).

Evidently, the Jewish population in Philippi, which was a Roman colony, was so small that the ten men<sup>1</sup> required for public worship were not present. Consequently, instead of going to the synagogue, Paul and company went to the river and found women meeting for prayer. Lydia, a seller of purple from the

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<sup>1</sup> “minyan: the number of persons required by Jewish law to be present to conduct a communal religious service, traditionally a minimum of 10 Jewish males over 13 years of age” (*dictionary.reference.com/browse/minyan*, accessed August 6, 2014).



city of Thyatira, received the gospel and became the first Christian convert in Europe. She opened her home to the missionary band, suggesting she was a lady of wealth and perhaps a widow.

Notice that believers in the Book of Acts, such as Lydia, were always baptized. Two households were like that in this chapter, for this is the Apostolic pattern. Consequently, if you haven't been baptized in Jesus' name, you are not a Christian in the biblical sense of the word.

### **Acts 16:16-24**

*“And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: the same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour. And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, and brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks” (Acts 16:16-24).*

No sooner did God begin to move than Satan began to try to hinder the work. Here he used a demonized girl who had made her masters wealthy by telling fortunes. She repeatedly shouted after Paul and Silas, “These men are the servants of the most high God, who show us the way of salvation!” Paul did not want his message “promoted” by one of Satan’s slaves, so he cast out the demon—because Satan may speak the truth one minute and a lie the next, and the unsaved wouldn’t know the difference. Her masters didn’t care about her, only the money they would lose. They accosted Paul and Silas, had them

whipped, and cast them into prison—simply for preaching the gospel. But it didn't even slow them down.

### **Acts 16:25-34**

“And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house” (Acts 16:25-34).

When the demonic girl failed to hinder Paul and Silas, her masters whipped up the angry crowd and turned the preachers over to the authorities. They ripped the clothes off Paul and Silas, beat them, and then put them in stocks in prison.

From a natural standpoint, Paul and Silas could have had a pity party and bemoaned their fate for preaching the gospel. Instead, they thanked God and sang praises at midnight. In response to their praise, God rocked the foundation of the prison with an earthquake. The doors of the cells banged open and the restraining bands of the prisoners loosened.

The midnight hour, the blackest hour of the night, is very significant in Scripture. Midnight was when the death angel went through Egypt. “And Moses said, Thus saith the LORD, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt” (Exodus 11:4). In the story of the ten virgins, Jesus said, “And at midnight there

was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him" (Matthew 25:6).

Even at midnight, "they sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them." Regardless of the circumstances, God can give songs in the night if we will pray. Elihu in the Book of Job said, "But none saith, Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night" (Job 35:10). Isaiah said,

"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the *opening of the prison to them that are bound*" (Isaiah 61:1, emphasis added).

Even at midnight, God can work miracles. Luke recorded, "there was a great earthquake . . . the foundations of the prison were shaken . . . all the doors were opened . . . every one's bands were loosed."

When the jailer awakened and saw the open prison cells, he pulled his sword to commit suicide, thinking the prisoners had escaped. Paul stopped him by reporting that the prisoners were all there. Why were the hardened criminals still in jail when they had a chance to escape? Could it be that the presence of God that swept into the prison profoundly overwhelmed them? Could it be that they chose to bask in the aura of God instead of fleeing?

When the jailer asked, "What must I do to be saved?" you can be sure that he received the same instruction from Paul as every other believer received in the Book of Acts. That's why there was a baptism after midnight ("the same hour").

The word *believe* in the New Testament is a synonym for the word *commit*—when you believe, you will obey. Believing is not mere mental assent; it is committing one's life totally to God. "Thou shalt be saved, and thy house." Claim that promise.

## **Acts 16:35-40**

"And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go. And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart,

and go in peace. But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out. And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans. And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city. And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed" (Acts 16:35-40),

Notice that Paul refused to sneak out of town, because that would have placed a cloud of suspicion over his ministry. Also notice how he used his Roman citizenship, not to avoid persecution for himself (he could have), but to bring protection to the church. It's all about the *message*.

### **Acts 17:1-9**

"Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: and Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go" (Acts 17:1-9).

Once again, Paul took the gospel “to the Jew first,” going to the synagogue. Over the course of three weeks, he “reasoned with them out of the scriptures” that “this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.” Once again, the Spirit of God brought great revival. Nevertheless, once again, vocal opposition created great persecution.

The rioting mob shouted, “These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also!” Jason’s experience here tells us that we may see spiritual opposition if we associate with an Apostolic ministry—but it is worth it. Everywhere the missionary team went there was either *riot* or revival, or *both*.

### **Acts 17:10-15**

“And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few. But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people. And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still. And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed” (Acts 17:10-15).

The Bereans were *more noble* because they received the Word with a ready mind and searched the Scriptures daily. They didn’t just take the preacher’s word for it; they wanted to know it for themselves. May we likewise have a great hunger and thirst for the Word of God.

When the Jews of Thessalonica heard that Paul was preaching in Berea, they stirred up more persecution. Fearing for Paul’s safety, the brethren sent Paul ahead to Athens, where he waited for Silas and Timothy.

## Acts 17:16-21

“Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbling say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection. And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing)” (Acts 17:16-21).

What Paul saw in the city stirred his spirit. (What about you?) He again took the gospel “to the Jew first,” and to those who were “devout persons,” then finally he met with the intellectuals of Athens.

The Greek religion was a mere deification of human attributes and the powers of nature. It was a religion entirely destitute of moral power. The Greek myths spoke of gods and goddesses who, in their own rivalries, acted more like humans than gods did. And the Greeks had plenty of deities to choose from. One common saying from ancient times was, “In Athens it is easier to find a god than a man.” The Greek gods were merely fictional characters that were unable to change men’s lives. With all of their culture and wisdom, the people of Athens—the city named after Athena, the goddess of wisdom—did not know the true God.

Epicureanism and stoicism were the main philosophies of ancient Athens. The *Epicurians* were a sect of philosophers who sought truth through experience rather than reasoning. They were materialists and atheists, and their goal in life was to embrace pleasure. *Stoics* were a sect of philosophers who rejected the idolatry of pagan worship and taught that there was one “World God.” They were pantheists, and they emphasized personal discipline and self-control. They sought truth through reasoning and tried to be unmoved by inner feelings or outward circumstances. They believed that pleasure was evil, and their goal in life was to embrace pain.

The Epicureans said, “Enjoy life!” and the Stoics said, “Endure life!” Paul was able to tell them how to find “abundant life.”

## **Acts 17:22-31**

“Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: for in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:22-31).

The Areopagus on Mars’ Hill was the highest court in Athens. Its council watched over religion and education in the city. Notice that Paul’s approach with these Gentiles was different from what he used with the Jews. With the Jews, he always reasoned out of Scripture, but with the Gentiles, he always reasoned from Creation—because Creation also reveals God. He opened his mouth, started where they were, and preached Jesus. The Athenians had an altar TO THE UNKNOWN GOD, which indicates spiritual hunger—so Paul told them about the God he knew. *“You’re looking for something, and I’ve already found it!”*

Paul testified that *God is not a distant deity*. “He be not far from every one of us” (verse 27). Here Paul quoted from the Greek poet Epimenides: “For in Him we live, and move, and have our being.” Then he added a quote from two poets, Aratus and Cleanthes: “For we are also His offspring.” He used his knowledge of their culture to preach Christ. His point was that God made us in His image, so we are foolish to make gods in our own image.

Paul stated, “And the times of this ignorance God winked at.” For centuries, God was patient with man’s sin and ignorance, holding back His divine wrath. However, in due time, God sent a Savior, and now He commands all men to repent of their foolish ways.

“Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: but when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Galatians 4:3-5).

“For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:6-8).

### **Acts 17:32-34**

“And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them” (Acts 17:32-34).

The intellectual Athenians stumbled over the resurrection of Jesus. Some mocked, some procrastinated any decision, some believed – just like today.

Paul proclaimed to the Corinthians:

“For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and



unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence" (I Corinthians 1:22-29).

## What Have You Learned?

Give short answers to the following questions

1. List Paul's stops on his second missionary journey.

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2. What was Timothy's ethnicity?

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3. What were the "decrees" mentioned in Acts 16:4?

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4. Why was Timothy circumcised when Titus was not?

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5. Describe Paul's vision while at Troas.

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6. How do we know that Luke traveled with Paul?

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7. What is known about Lydia?

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8. What happened to Lydia after the Lord opened her heart?

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9. Whom did the Philippians proclaim Paul and Silas to be?

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10. Why did Paul cast the devil out of the damsel?

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11. What charges did the damsel's masters bring against Paul and Silas?

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12. What did the Roman mob do to Paul and Silas?

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13. How did Paul and Silas react to being locked in prison?

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14. What question did the jailer ask? What was the response to the answer?

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15. Why did Paul call attention to his Roman citizenship?

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16. Who was Jason? What happened to him?

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17. Why were the Bereans “more noble than those in Thessalonica”?

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18. What is the difference between Epicureans and Stoics?

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19. What stirred Paul's spirit within him?

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20. What is the Areopagus?

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21. What inscription did Paul find on the altar?

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22. What was Paul's approach in ministering to the Athenians?

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23. Whom did Paul quote in his preaching to the Athenians? Why?

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24. How did the Athenians respond to Paul's preaching?

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## Lesson 20

# Acts 18:1-19:20

### Recap

*Paul was in the middle of his second missionary journey as recorded in Acts. Silas and Timothy had temporarily stayed behind in Berea, while Paul traveled on to Athens and, of course, found a group to preach to. Acts 17:22-23 records, "Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you."*

*Paul began where the men of Athens were theologically. They did not know about the Mosaic law or the Jewish priesthood and rituals. They did know about the myriad of Greek gods and goddesses. And in case they missed one, they had erected an altar to the "Unknown God." Having met them where they were, Paul opened his mouth and proclaimed, "I saw your altar to the Unknown God. You are looking for something. I've already found it and am here to tell you about it." Then starting with Creation, Paul stated, "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands" (Acts 17:24) and continued on to preach the resurrection of the dead.*

### Acts 18:1-6

*"After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; and found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and*

came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles" (Acts 18:1-6).

Aquila and Priscilla, Jewish Christians, fled Rome when Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from the city. They settled in Corinth and resumed their occupation of making tents. Because Paul was also a tentmaker, he stayed with Aquila and Priscilla and labored in their shop. On the Sabbath, Paul went to the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews concerning Jesus the Messiah.

Luke recorded Paul's *itinerary*, but Paul later recorded in I Corinthians the *insecurity* he felt when entering the city of Corinth (perhaps because of the rejection he had experienced when preaching in Athens):

"And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (I Corinthians 2:1-5).

We cannot build the kingdom of God on intellectualism. We cannot build it by winning doctrinal arguments. Instead, Paul said he laid aside wisdom and excellency of speech. He came in fear and in weakness. He did not try to impress anyone. He simply reached out for a move of the Spirit of God. When man's wisdom fails, we must rely on the power of God.

Once again, the Jews refused Paul's message and opposed his ministry. This is the first time he declared that he was going to turn his full attention to the Gentiles, and he quoted Ezekiel 33:3-4: "If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people; then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him

away, his blood shall be upon his own head." To have blood on your hands means that you bear responsibility for someone else's destruction because you did not warn them. But to have blood on your head means that you are to blame for your own destruction.

A strong Jewish church should have arisen after the Day of Pentecost and followed Jesus' order to go into all the world. However, because of their cultural pride and spiritual blindness, they refused to reach out to the Gentiles. Consequently, they were responsible for their own eternal destiny as Paul focused his ministry on the Gentiles.

Corinth was a city known across the empire for its wickedness. Later, Paul would write the Book of Romans from here. He could look out his window and see chapter one fulfilled right in front of his own eyes. But great wickedness did not stop Paul from having great revival. Paul wrote:

"Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them" (Romans 1:22-32).

But that wasn't the end of the story. Four chapters later, Paul wrote, "Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Romans 5:20).

## Acts 18:7-11

"And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them" (Acts 18:7-11).

This time, Paul did not leave the city despite persecution, because he had a word from the Lord of *protection* ("I am with thee") and *promise* ("I have much people in this city"). His ministry extended over eighteen months in Corinth and left behind a powerful church. The Corinthian church did not consist of many mighty and noble people but of sinners whose lives the grace of God had transformed. Writing to the Corinthians, Paul penned:

"For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence" (I Corinthians 1:26-29).

"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are



justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (I Corinthians 6:9-11).

### **Acts 18:12-17**

"And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat, Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law. And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: but if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters. And he drave them from the judgment seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things" (Acts 18:12-17).

Luke recorded this instance of divine protection where God used a pagan ruler to defend an apostolic preacher. While the Jewish council had prohibited the apostles to preach, no evidence indicates that the Roman government ever did so. While there was some opposition, Roman officials in cities such as Philippi, Corinth, and Ephesus were not only tolerant but almost cooperative. In this incident, Gallio, the Roman deputy, refused to be dragged into theological dispute involving the Jews.

Paul knew how to use his Roman citizenship wisely so that the government worked for him and not against him, and he was careful not to accuse the government or ignore its authority.

### **Acts 18:18**

"And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow" (Acts 18:18).

The *vow* referred to here is from *euche*, the same word used in James 5:15 for the "prayer" of faith. Paul did not shave his head because he was finishing a

Nazarite vow (Number 6:18), for Gentile believers in the New Testament church did not practice that. Rather, he had just been delivered from the court of Gallio, so he needed to cut (“kiero”) his hair because he was going to prayer. Paul knew that God cared what his hair looked like.

### **Acts 18:19-22**

“And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; but bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus. And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch” (Acts 18:19-22).

Paul desired to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost, not because it was necessary to keep the Jewish feasts, but because the city would be full of people that he would be able to preach to. Verse 22 marks the end of his second missionary journey, and he reported to his home church in Antioch—he had been away for nearly two years for this journey.

### **Acts 18:23-28**

“And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples. And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: for he mightily convinced the Jews, and that

publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ" (Acts 18:22-28).

As Paul began his third missionary journey, Luke gave considerable detail about the time he spent in Ephesus. Because it was such a strategic city, Paul spent three years of his ministry there (Acts 20:31) – the longest he stayed in any city. Ephesus had a large harbor that made it a wealthy city and a massive temple to the goddess Diana that made it a religious city, steeped in idolatry and the occult. It also had revival.

Before Paul even arrived in Ephesus, God started putting people in place for what He wanted to do—one of them was an eloquent preacher named Apollos. He knew the Old Testament Scriptures well, and he was "fervent in the spirit," but he had an incomplete message. His message only got as far as John the Baptist and then stopped. He knew nothing about Calvary, the resurrection of Jesus, or the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. He had zeal, but he lacked knowledge. Apollos knew about the promises of God, but he didn't know about their fulfillment. *Apollos's message was not inaccurate or insincere, merely incomplete.*

Thankfully, however, he met Aquila and Priscilla who knew the full revelation of God's truth for the church. They could have *condemned* him for not having full truth, or simply *compromised* and accepted him as he was—but that is not the approach the Apostolics took in the Book of Acts. Instead, they took him aside and *taught* him the gospel in its fullness. Then, once he received that revelation, they *commended* his ministry.

## **Acts 19:1-7**

"And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, he said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy

Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve” (Acts 19:1-7).

Something similar happened once Paul arrived in Ephesus. He found a group of disciples who were perhaps some of Apollos’s early converts, because they also had an incomplete understanding—they had not even heard about the Holy Ghost. Notice what the Apostolics did anytime they encountered someone lacking a full revelation of truth—they opened their mouth, started where they were, and preached unto them Jesus.

This passage in Acts 19 sets a biblical precedent for anyone who has been baptized in any way other than in the name of Jesus, which is the only saving name (Acts 4:12). Verse 5 tells us that they were (re)baptized “in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Furthermore, verse 6 once again shows us what the Apostolics expected to happen every time believers received the baptism of the Holy Ghost in the Book of Acts: “and they spake with tongues, (and prophesied).”

## **Acts 19:8-12**

“And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them” (Acts 19:8-12).

“But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries” (I Corinthians 16:8-9).

For three months, Paul went to the synagogue and argued with the Jews. When they rejected his message, he moved to the school of Tyrannus and continued his daily disputing. As a result, the gospel spread throughout Asia

Minor. What a wonderful testimony to say, “All they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus.”

Miracles accompanied Paul’s ministry. Notice that once again *miracles* drew people’s attention to the *message* – that is the Apostolic pattern.

## **Acts 19:13-20**

“Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed” (Acts 19:13-20).

Things got interesting when the seven sons of Sceva tried to cast out demons. The demon said, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are YOU?” The imps knew Jesus and Paul by reputation but were not impressed by the would-be exorcists. The demonic attack on Sceva’s sons shows that before one uses the name of Jesus, he should be endued with the power behind the name by being filled with the Spirit and baptized in water in the name of Jesus.

Those that used curious arts brought their occult books and burned them. The total value of the books they burned equaled the total salaries of one hundred and fifty men working for a whole year. These people had a real conversion that involved real repentance, and God responded.

True repentance and revival bring a hunger for the Word of God. Luke recorded, “So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.” Watch the pattern

in the Book of Acts: when the *Word* prevails, the *church* prevails. And it still works the same way today.

## What Have You Learned?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. Who were Aquila and Priscilla? What was their occupation? Why did they leave Rome? \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. What was Paul's normal activity on the Sabbath?  
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\_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Describe Paul's attitude as he entered Corinth.  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
4. How does Ezekiel 33:3-4 relate to Paul's ministry?  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
5. Identify:
  - A. Sceva \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. Justus \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. Apollos \_\_\_\_\_
  - D. Tyrannus \_\_\_\_\_
  - E. Gallio \_\_\_\_\_
  - F. Crispus \_\_\_\_\_
  - G. Sosthenes \_\_\_\_\_

6. Describe Paul's ministry in Corinth. How did it differ from his ministry in Athens? \_\_\_\_\_

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7. What was the Lord's message to Paul in the night vision?

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8. How did Gallio respond to the accusations by the Jews against Paul? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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9. Describe the character and abilities of Apollos.

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10. How long did Paul minister in Ephesus?

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11. Describe the relationship between Apollos and Aquila and Priscilla.

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12. What was Paul's question to the disciples in Ephesus?

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13. How did the disciples in Ephesus respond to Paul's preaching?

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14. Why were the disciples in Ephesus rebaptized?

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15. Why could the sons of Sceva not cast out the demons?

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## Lesson 21

# Acts 19:21-21:14

### Recap

*As Paul began his third missionary journey, Luke gave considerable detail about the time he spent in Ephesus. Because it was such a strategic city, Paul spent three years of his ministry there (Acts 20:31) – the longest he stayed in any city. Ephesus had a large harbor that made it a wealthy city and a massive temple to the goddess Diana that made it a religious city, steeped in idolatry and the occult. It also had revival.*

*Luke recorded, “And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10). The New Testament church did so much with so little to evangelize the world. May the twenty-first church with all of its technology and wealth be as diligent to fulfill the Great Commission.*

*Writing to the church in Corinth, Paul stated, “But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries” (I Corinthians 16:8-9). Paul was keenly attuned to the Spirit and realized the potential outreach and growth in Ephesus and surrounding areas. Yet he was grounded in reality. His stating, “. . . and there are many adversaries . . .” indicates that he understood there would be opposition. If God opens a door of opportunity, Christians can expect the devil to raise up adversaries to hinder the work.*

### Acts 19:21-29

*“After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem,*

saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome. So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season. And the same time there arose no small stir about that way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: so that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth. And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre" (Acts 19:21-29).

Verse 21 is the first mention of Paul's plan to go to Rome. Rome was the capital and center of the empire. Naturally, he would want to preach in the realm's most influential city. The process of his going to Rome occupies essentially the last third of the Book of Acts. To the Romans he wrote, "So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also" (Romans 1:15).

He told the Romans, "For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem" (Romans 15:26). Consequently, Paul sent Timothy and Erastus ahead, because they were collecting an offering from Macedonian churches for the poor Christians in Jerusalem. Undoubtedly, Paul hoped that the funds received from the Gentile Christians in Macedonia would bless the Jewish believers in Jerusalem and help to heal the rift. However, he had already determined to go to Rome after he had gone to Jerusalem for Pentecost.

Meanwhile in Ephesus, Demetrius and his silversmiths were promoting idolatry and immorality by selling shrines. They hated Paul's preaching because it was cutting into their livelihood as the people believed and converted to Christianity. Demetrius made use of the two things the Ephesians loved the

most—the honor of their city and the greatness of their goddess Diana and her temple—to stir up an angry riot of thousands against Paul. Since the mob couldn't find Paul, they seized two of his helpers, Gaius and Aristarchus.

### **Acts 19:30-41**

“And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre. Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together. And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people. But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter? Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly. For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess. Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another. But if ye inquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly. For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly” (Acts 19:30-41).

Paul, of course, wanted to enter the theater (what an opportunity for preaching the gospel), but the believers and some of the city leaders wisely counseled him to stay away. The mob was angry. Before long, a Jew named Alexander tried to address the crowd, probably just to explain to them that the Jews did not endorse Paul's message. His very presence, however, only aroused the mob even more. For two more hours they shouted, “Great is Diana of the

Ephesians.” Would to God that we Pentecostals would get as excited about worshiping the God of glory.

The city clerk finally got matters under control, using the same tactics that the silversmiths used to arouse the mob—the greatness of their city and of their goddess. He wisely pointed out that the men they were railing against were “neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess.” He concluded, “We are in danger to be called in question for this day’s uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse.” He was reminding the Ephesians that unless they settled down, the Roman soldiers would step in to control the situation. Wisely, the mob dispersed.

In this situation and in others throughout the Book of Acts, Luke made it clear that unbelieving Jews and not primarily Romans or Gentiles incited the persecution against the Christian church. This was another time that God used pagans to help the apostles.

Isn’t it amazing that the religious people most like Paul were the ones who opposed him the most? At this time, the Jews were the ones most like Apostolic Christianity. The Jews knew “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD” (Deuteronomy 6:4). They knew “Ye shall be holy: for I . . . am holy” (Leviticus 19:2). The Jews knew about the commands and principles of God. The Jews knew about the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah. Isn’t it funny that the most religious people are sometimes the hardest against truth?

The Temple of Diana in Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Its 127 sixty-foot-high Ionic columns covered an area 337 feet by 180 feet, four times the size of the Parthenon. Today the magnificent temple lies in ruins. A rusty sign and column fragments stacked on a cement base now commemorate the temple. On the other hand, the God of Paul is still alive and well. He lives in the hearts of those who accept Him as Savior.

## **Acts 20:1-6**

“And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia. And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece, And there abode three months. And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was

about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia. And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus. These going before tarried for us at Troas. And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days" (Acts 20:1-6).

After calm was restored to the city, Paul called the elders together and departed for Macedonia. He didn't leave because he was afraid. He left because his work was done. He traveled on to Greece where he stayed for three months. He had planned to sail to Syria but discovered that Jews were lying in wait for him. Consequently, he traveled back through Macedonia, accompanied by some of the disciples. He sailed for Troas from Philippi and abode there for seven days.

### **Acts 20:7-12**

"And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight. And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together. And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead. And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him. When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed. And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted" (Acts 20:7-12).

Please note that the New Testament church worshiped on the first day of the week. This they termed the Lord's Day, for it was the day that Jesus arose from the dead.

Even though some modern groups teach that Christians should worship on Saturday – the Sabbath – because the Old Testament believers did, the New Testament believers worshiped on Sunday. In some parts of the world, the prevailing culture makes worshiping on another day more convenient. The day

doesn't really matter. But since we want to be like the New Testament church, our main worship is on Sunday—but we also worship on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday.

Paul's final address to the saints was lengthy. He preached until midnight. As he preached, Eutychus fell asleep and toppled from the third floor loft. Paul went down and prayed for the young man. He then broke bread, talked until daybreak, and then departed.

The others brought Eutychus up and rejoiced that he was alive. Luke makes this statement almost a passing comment. Miracles were not a big thing in the New Testament church. They were expected. Miracles came because the apostles were preaching the right message. Jesus said that signs would follow them that believed.

### **Acts 20:13-16**

And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot. And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene. And we sailed thence, and came the next day over against Chios; and the next day we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogyllium; and the next day we came to Miletus. For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost" (Acts 20:13-16).

The *we* in verse 13 indicates that Luke had joined the evangelistic team. They sailed to Assos to pick up Paul who had gone afoot. From there they sailed on to Mitylene, Chios, Samos, Trogyllium, and Miletus. Paul was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost.

### **Acts 20:17-21**

"And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all

humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: *and how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you*, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:17-21, emphasis added).

Not wanting to take the time to travel to Ephesus, Paul sent for the elders of Ephesus to meet him in Miletus. Paul affirmed that he did not withhold anything profitable for the leaders. In his ministry, he taught publicly as well as privately from house to house, testifying to both Jews and Gentiles, preaching repentance unto God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Acts 20:22-27**

"And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. *But none of these things move me*, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. *For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God*" (Acts 20:22-27, emphasis added.)

Paul did not hide from them the fact that he was bound in his spirit to go to Jerusalem, even though he knew that danger and possible death awaited him there. The Holy Spirit had witnessed this message to him in city after city. A lesser man would have found some way to escape, but not Paul. He stated, "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry." It didn't matter that danger, affliction, hardship, and possible death awaited him. His calling and his devotion to Jesus Christ gripped him too tightly for him to look for some safe and easy way out.

Paul would later write to Timothy, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (II Timothy 4:7). He knew that this

would be the last time he would be seeing the elders of Ephesus. He could say to them he was “pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” His conscience was clear. He did not shy away from boldly declaring the whole word of God in spite of the possible calamity confronting him. The uncertainty of the future did not move or affect him. He did not choose what to preach and what not to teach. He preached it all—without fear and without favor.

### **Acts 20:28-38**

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, *which he hath purchased with his own blood*. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul’s neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship” (Acts 20:28-38, emphasis added).

Paul cautioned the elders as overseers to take care the church, to feed and nurture the flock. The church is precious to God. It is the only thing God ever had to purchase. Everything else God created: the sun, moon, and stars, all of the animal kingdoms, and humanity. However, He purchased the church with His own blood. The purchase price shows it is of utmost value to Him. The church cost Him His own blood.



Paul knew that false teachers would arise. Therefore, he commanded the elders to be diligent, to be on guard. Paul warned them about the dangers *around* us (“wolves”), dangers *among* us (“of your own selves”), and dangers *within* us (“unto yourselves”).

Paul reminded the elders that he had labored among them for three years, working with his own hands to provide for his own needs and the needs of those that were with him. During that time, he had warned them night and day with tears to be watchful.

Paul also quoted words from Jesus that are not even in the gospels; they came from oral tradition.

Having concluded his message, Paul knelt and prayed for them all. They embraced and kissed Paul, sorrowing that they would see him no more. They accompanied Paul to the ship and bade him farewell.

## **Acts 21:1-7**

“And it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara: and finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth. Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden. And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem. And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed. And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship; and they returned home again. And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day” (Acts 21:1-7).

In Patara Paul and his company transferred to a boat sailing for Phoenicia. The ship entered the harbor at Tyre to unload its cargo. Paul had not been to Tyre before and sought out disciples in the city.

Paul spent seven days fellowshiping with the Christians. They began to prophesy that his visit to Jerusalem would be difficult and dangerous. In Tyre, the believers “kept on saying to him” (Greek) that he should not set foot in Jerusalem.

Although Paul had never been with the Christians in Tyre before, it is touching to see how much they came to love him after only a week. When he was to depart, the Christians brought their families to bid him and his companions farewell. They gathered and knelt in prayer on the beach. Then Paul continued on his journey to Ptolemais, modern-day Acre, Israel, where he remained one day with the disciples.

### **Acts 21:8-12**

“And the next day we that were of Paul’s company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy. And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul’s girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem” (Acts 21:8-12).

In Caesarea, the men stayed with Philip, one of the original deacons. While there, the prophet Agabus gave Paul a second warning message. He bound his own hands and feet with Paul’s girdle and told the apostle that he would be bound in Jerusalem. Of course, the believers in Caesarea then begged Paul not to go. But Paul told them that he was prepared to die if necessary. After all, Agabus did not forbid Paul to go to Jerusalem; he only told him what to expect if he did go.

### **Acts 21:13-14**

“Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not

be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.”  
(Acts 21:13-14).

Paul’s reply did not reflect any fear. In essence, he said, “I’m not going to play it safe. I’m going to do the will of God.”

## What Have You Learned?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. Identify:

- A. Timotheus \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Erastus \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Demetrius \_\_\_\_\_
- D. Diana \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Gaius \_\_\_\_\_
- F. Aristarchus \_\_\_\_\_
- G. Alexander \_\_\_\_\_
- H. Sopater \_\_\_\_\_
- I. Secundus \_\_\_\_\_
- J. Eutychus \_\_\_\_\_

2. Paul planned to visit Rome after he \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Why did Demetrius stir up trouble in Ephesus?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Why did Paul send Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia?  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. What did Paul write to the Romans about his desire to visit their city?

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6. How did the city clerk in Ephesus quiet the mob?

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7. Describe the Temple of Diana. \_\_\_\_\_

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8. Describe Paul's final meeting with the elders of Ephesus.

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9. What were the dangers "around," "among," and "within"?

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10. Who was Agabus?

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11. What was Agabus's message to Paul?

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12. What was Paul's reply to Agabus?

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## **Personal Study Notes**

## Lesson 22

# Acts 21:15-23:35

### Recap

*Paul received messages from several friends that his visit to Jerusalem would be difficult and dangerous. Most recently in Caesarea, the prophet Agabus bound his own hands and feet with Paul's girdle and told the apostle that he would be bound in Jerusalem. Of course, the believers begged Paul not to go. But Paul told them he was prepared to die for the name of Jesus if necessary.*

*"Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done" (Acts 21:13-14).*

*In essence, Paul replied, "I'm not going to play it safe. I'm going to do the will of God!"*

### Acts 21:15-22

*"And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem. There went with us also certain of the disciples of Caesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge. And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. And*

when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: and they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come" (Acts 21:15-22).

Leaving Caesarea, Paul and his companions took carriages to Jerusalem. The brethren there received him gladly and listened intently as he gave a detailed account of their missionary travel. James and the elders glorified God for what was happening among the Gentiles. Nevertheless, they were still yielding to pressure from the Judaizers in Jerusalem. Thousands of Jews now believed in Jesus, but this group was still more concerned about whether the law of Moses was being honored than about how many Gentiles were entering the Kingdom.

The same grace that gave the Gentiles freedom to *abstain* from the law of Moses also gave the Jews freedom to *observe* the Law, as long as they didn't trust in the Law for salvation, but that wasn't enough for the Judaizers. They wanted to "police" the apostle Paul and effectively mobilized the "rumor mill" against him before he even returned to Jerusalem. And the elders in the Jerusalem church were so concerned about possible division that they enlisted Paul's help.

### **Acts 21:23-29**

"Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law. As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication. Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them. And when the seven days were almost ended,



the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, crying out, Men of Israel, help: this is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple)" (Acts 21:23-29).

The elders asked Paul to accompany four men who were taking a vow of purification in the Temple, which would prove the rumors about Paul dishonoring the Mosaic law were false. Even though Paul knew and taught that the Old Testament law had been fulfilled, he agreed to inconvenience himself and submit to their request because of a higher principle he would clarify in his first letter to the church in Corinth:

"For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you" (I Corinthians 9:19-23).

Out of respect for James and the other Christian elders, Paul agreed to accompany the men to the Temple for their rite of purification. He knew that the Old Testament law was no longer applicable, so he inconvenienced himself in order to submit to the elders. As long as the activity was not contrary to the law of Christ, Paul was willing to make himself a servant to all. He was willing to become all things to all men in order to win them to Christ – for the gospel's sake.

However, despite the elders' good intentions, their plan was a miserable failure. The Judaizers didn't intend to stop spreading rumors, and they were watching for any excuse to trap Paul. In the Temple stood a wall beyond which no Gentile could go, bearing this solemn inscription: "No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the sanctuary and enclosure. Anyone who is caught so doing will have himself to blame for his ensuing death." Some Jews

from Asia saw Paul in the Temple and immediately jumped to the conclusion that he had polluted their sacred Temple by bringing past the barricade the Gentiles who had accompanied him to Jerusalem. It was totally untrue, but it was totally effective – and it resulted in a riot.

By the way, Paul later referred to this “wall of partition” when he wrote the Book of Ephesians:

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:8-22).

- “By grace are ye saved through faith” isn’t an alternative to Acts 2:38 but rather an explanation of why we don’t have to keep Old Testament law.
- “Not of works” isn’t telling us that we don’t do good works, because the next verse tells us we are created in Christ Jesus “unto good works.”

- “The middle wall of partition between us” refers to the old barrier that stood between Gentiles and Jews in the Temple in Jerusalem.
- Not only can we enter the Temple, we now are the temple of God.

## **Acts 21:30-40**

“And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut. And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul. Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done. And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle. And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him. And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek? Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers? But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people. And when he had given him licence, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying” (Acts 21:30-40).

The mob seized Paul and would have killed him had the Roman guards not intervened just in time. Thankfully, at least 1,000 soldiers were stationed in the Antonia Fortress at the northwest corner of the Temple area at any given time. When the captain tried to interrogate the crowd, most of them didn’t even know the cause of their agitation, so he removed Paul from immediate danger and took him into the fortress. He at first thought Paul was an Egyptian rebel who the Romans wanted for inciting a revolt, but once Paul explained his background, he actually allowed the apostle to stand out of harm’s way on the

stairs and address the crowd below. Paul always took every opportunity to preach.

## **Acts 22:1-10**

“Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence which I make now unto you. (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith,) I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day. And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished. And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do” (Acts 22:1-10).

This is the second of three times in Acts that we have testimony of Paul’s dramatic conversion, and this is certainly a dramatic setting for sharing it.

Note how Paul listed his Jewish credentials: he was a Jew, a native of Tarsus, brought up in Jerusalem, trained by Gamaliel, a follower of the Law, a zealous persecutor of the church, and a representative of the Sanhedrin. How could his countrymen not respectfully listen to a man with that kind of record? Instead of accusing them of participating in a riot, he commended them for being “zealous toward God.” He admitted that he too had been guilty of having people arrested and bound—and even killed. He had them so spellbound by this point

that they continued to listen even when he began to speak about his conversion and mentioned the name of Jesus.

## **Acts 22:11-21**

“And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord. And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; and saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: and when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles” (Acts 22:11-21).

Note that when Ananias had finished his sermon to Saul, he had quickly directed him to be baptized and wash away his sins. This was standard New Testament church practice. As Peter said on the Day of Pentecost, “Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus.”

Sometime after his conversion, Paul had returned to Jerusalem where the brethren in Jerusalem had not received him well. As he was in a trance while in the Temple, the Lord had told Paul to leave Jerusalem quickly, because the people would not receive his witness. At first, Paul debated with the Lord. He wanted to show the Jews that he was a new person and tell them that Jesus was the Messiah and He was alive. If Paul won some of them to the Lord, it would perhaps help to compensate for all the damage he had done. Nevertheless, the Lord’s command was, “Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.”

Paul was about to explain this to the crowd, but they would not listen to anything else he said after he uttered the word *Gentiles*.

Many in the crowd were Jewish believers, holding Moses in one hand and Jesus in the other. They were so prejudiced that . . .

- They didn't care that the Gentiles didn't know the one true God.
- They didn't care that the prophets foretold the Gentiles coming into the church.
- They didn't care that God was visiting the Gentiles by His Spirit.
- They didn't care that they were persecuting God's messenger.
- They didn't care that their actions and attitude grieved God.

Unfortunately, this same mentality continues in some churches in some places. This attitude offends God who wants the gospel to go to every tribe and tongue.

### **Acts 22:22-30**

“And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live. And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air, the chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him. And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman. Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born. Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him. On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and

commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them" (Acts 22:22-30).

When the captain saw the riot was starting again, he took Paul into the barracks for "examination by torture." The apostle had not yet mentioned his citizenship, but it was unlawful to scourge a Roman citizen. Once Paul exercised his rights, he was considered "innocent until proven guilty"—so the captain commanded the Jewish council to hear the case and decide if he had broken their law or if he was worthy of punishment.

When Paul was converted, God gave Ananias a prophetic word about this former persecutor of the church, that his ministry would include great suffering, and would take him before Gentiles, Jews, and even kings. At this point in Acts, the fulfillment of that word began to accelerate. Luke recorded:

"But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake" (Acts 9:15-16).

## **Acts 23:1-5**

"And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth. Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law? And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest? Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people" (Acts 23:1-5).

History records that this particular high priest was one of the most corrupt men ever to hold the office. He stole tithes from the other priests and did all he could to increase his authority. He was a brutal man, known for caring more for Rome's favor than for Israel's welfare. In calling the high priest a "whited wall," Paul was simply saying that the man was a hypocrite. Paul didn't recognize the high priest, for this was an informal meeting of the council and perhaps he was not wearing his traditional garments. Paul had also been away

from Jerusalem for many years and probably did not know many of the men now on the council.

### **Acts 23:6-10**

“But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both. And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees’ part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God. And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle” (Acts 23:6-10).

Paul now wisely inserted a doctrinal issue into his testimony. He declared the real reason the Jews were persecuting him was his faith in the doctrine of the Resurrection. Paul knew that the Pharisees and Sadducees violently disagreed over this issue and that it would divide the council and would get the members disputing among themselves. The response was so violent that the captain and his men rushed down to the floor of the council chamber and rescued their prisoner for the second time.

Paul wasn’t just “playing politics.” He was absolutely right when he said that the real issue was the doctrine of the Resurrection. He wasn’t referring to “resurrection” in general, but the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The entire testimony of the Book of Acts centers on the Resurrection.

### **Acts 23:11**

“And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome” (Acts 23:11).



This was not the first time Paul had received a word from the Lord during times of danger or discouragement. Here, Jesus let him know that no matter what happened in Jerusalem, he would eventually get to preach the gospel in Rome. God is always walking with us, even if our difficulties seem insurmountable.

## **Acts 23:12-22**

“And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy. And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to morrow, as though ye would inquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him. And when Paul’s sister’s son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul. Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him. So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee. Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me? And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to morrow into the council, as though they would inquire somewhat of him more perfectly. But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee. So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me” (Acts 23:12-22).

Paul’s life had been in danger from the very beginning of his ministry when he witnessed for Christ in Damascus (Acts 9:22-25).

- During his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion, the Hellenistic Jews tried to kill him (Acts 9:29).
- The Jews drove him out of Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:50-51).
- The Jews threatened to stone him in Iconium (Acts 14:5).
- They stoned Paul in Lystra (Acts 14:19-20).
- In Corinth, the Jews tried to get him arrested (Acts 18:12-17).
- In Ephesus, the Jews plotted to kill him (Acts 20:19).
- They even planned to kill him at sea (Acts 20:3).
- Paul truly suffered many things at the hands of his own countrymen—and now in chapter 23, more than forty of them vowed not to eat until they had killed him.

*What are the chances that Paul's nephew would overhear this plot?*

It doesn't appear from history that Paul's sister and her son were even Christians, but God used them to protect Paul. He also used a pagan Roman captain, who didn't want to lose a prisoner in his custody, so he decided to send Paul to Caesarea and place him under the authority of Felix, the Roman governor. Also in light of the evil plot against Paul's life, the captain even decided to give him an official military escort to protect him from the conspirators.

## **Acts 23:23-35**

“And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night; and provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor. And he wrote a letter after this manner: Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting. This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman. And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council: whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds. And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell. Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul,

and brought him by night to Antipatris. On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle: who, when they came to Caesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him. And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia; I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall" (Acts 23:23-35).

The centurions delivered Paul to Antonius Felix, the procurator of Judea. Paul was under arrest until his accusers came to Caesarea to appear at his hearing. It was a frustrating waiting game, to say the least, and he had no idea how it would end. His entire fate was now in the hands of unsaved men who might decide to kill him just on a whim.

But wait a minute. Paul traveled the sixty-five miles to Caesarea accompanied by a bodyguard of two centurions, two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen—a total of 472 people. Paul didn't even have to walk this time, for they had given him a beast to ride. God knows how to protect you physically and even more so spiritually.

David wrote these words in his "diary" when he was fleeing from Saul:

"I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together. I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him" (Psalm 34:1-8).

And Paul uttered these words when all the other Christians were afraid: "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24).

*"I'm not going to play it safe – I'm going to do the will of God!"*

## What Have You Learned?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. How did the brethren in Jerusalem receive Paul during his last visit?

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2. Identify:

- A. Mnason of Cypress \_\_\_\_\_  
B. Trophimus \_\_\_\_\_  
C. Gamaliel \_\_\_\_\_  
D. Felix \_\_\_\_\_  
E. Claudius Lysias \_\_\_\_\_

3. Who were the Judaizers and what did they teach?

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4. What was the elders' plan to quiet the Judaizers' criticism of Paul?

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5. Why was Paul willing to go to the Temple with the four men?

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6. What was the middle wall of partition?

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7. Spiritually, how was the middle wall of partition removed for us?

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8. Summarize Paul's defense before the mob.

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9. How was Paul's Roman citizenship valuable to him?

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10. What was a major difference between the Pharisees and Sadducees?

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## **Personal Study Notes**

## Lesson 23

# Acts 24:1-26:32

### Recap

*We are at the point in our study of the Book of Acts where Paul has been arrested several times – but this time it is final. He has been imprisoned many times, but this time it is for good. He has seen many miraculous deliverances, but this time there will not be one. He has seen angels walk into his prison cell and deliver him. He has witnessed chains falling off and doors opening, and he has walked out a free man. He has witnessed many miracles, but this time there will not be any.*

*Sometimes God has a purpose in walking His people through a trial. When Paul was converted, God gave Ananias a prophetic word about this former persecutor of the church. God told him that Paul's ministry would include great suffering, and it would take him before Gentiles, Jews, and even kings.*

*“But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake” (Acts 9:15-16).*

*Most recently in our study, the Jews had arrested Paul on false charges of profaning the Temple in Jerusalem. For Paul's protection, over four hundred soldiers escorted him to Caesarea, the headquarters of Antonius Felix, the procurator of Judea, who placed him under arrest until Paul's accusers made the journey to Caesarea to appear at his hearing.*

*The apostle was in chains. In chains, he didn't have mobility. In chains, he didn't have freedom. In chains, he didn't have the confidence he used to have. In chains, he knew*

*that he was dependent on so many other factors. It looked like his fate was in the hands of wicked men – but Paul knew better. He knew that even if all one can see is prison bars, doors, and chains, God is in Heaven, and one’s circumstances does not determine his or her fate.*

*In a few days, the high priest, some Jewish elders, and a lawyer appeared.*

## **Acts 24:1-9**

“And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul. And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words. *For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law. But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands, commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him. And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so”* (Acts 24:1-9, emphasis added).

Tertullus, a lawyer with noted oratorical skills, used flattery to impress Felix and to score points for the Jewish side. He accused Paul of three crimes:

- Being a pestilent fellow—Paul was a pest in that he continually preached the gospel, thereby creating disturbances among the Romans throughout the empire—an offense against the Roman government (*crimen majestatis*).
- Being the ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes—Paul went around converting as many Jews as he could.
- Profaning the Temple—a crime that the Jews were allowed to punish.



Paul was guilty of the lesser charges. However, the charge of profaning the Temple was ludicrous. Paul had been back in the city of Jerusalem less than two weeks, so he certainly didn't have time to stir up sedition and rebellion among the Jews. He hadn't even preached in the city. When he went to the Temple, he simply went to worship. The records (Acts 21:18-26) show that he—at the suggestion of James—paid the costs for four Jewish believers who had taken a Nazarite vow (the Greek word in Acts 21:22 is *ekho*).

It is clear that Paul went through the purification ceremony with these men. It is not clear whether he shaved his head as well (“that *they* may shave *their* heads” – Acts 21:24). Neither action would have contradicted Paul's teaching because, while he was not bound to the Jewish law, he could certainly comply with it if that helped him to influence others for the gospel cause. He was truly “all things to all men, that [he] might by all means save some” (I Corinthians 9:22). Furthermore, he had brought with him an offering from various churches to benefit Jewish believers in Jerusalem. Paul was *keeping* the Law, not *breaking* it.

The real issue was that he had been preaching the Resurrection. The Pharisees believed this doctrine, but refused to admit that Jesus rose from the dead.

## **Acts 24:10-21**

“Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: and have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men. Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult.

Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had aught against me. Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council, except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day" (Acts 24:10-21).

Some people are scared to death of the word *heresy*. Critics have always called Apostolics heretics. From the beginning of the church age in the Book of Acts, some have accusingly said, "You believe false doctrine." The reason they said that and the reason they say it now in the twenty-first century is that we refuse to make Jesus a part of God, a junior god, or a part of a committee of gods. We just believe and live that there is only one God—just like the Bible teaches. We believe that when God said to Moses, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord," He was saying, "And one day, the one Lord will take on human flesh and come down to earth to shed His own blood."

When did God—a spirit being—have flesh and blood? Only one time. It was when He manifested Himself in flesh and walked on earth and allowed men to nail Him to a cross. The blood that trickled down was—doctrinally, actually, theologically, biblically, legally—Emmanuel's blood; it was Jehovah's blood; it was Elohim's blood. It was the blood of the God of the universe who created every blood cell and put it in His body when He manifested Himself in flesh. That is why deliverance, salvation, and healing are in the blood of Jesus.

When given the opportunity, Paul quickly declared his innocence regarding the fabricated charge of profaning the Temple. He didn't do it. Neither could the Jews substantiate their accusation. However, Paul also quickly confessed he worshiped God in a manner considered heresy by the Jews, while "believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets."

Although Felix realized that Paul was innocent of these trumped-up charges, he left him in custody and repeatedly interviewed him over the next two years, hoping that eventually he would receive a bribe to secure Paul's freedom. Felix was convicted by these conversations, but not changed—he waited for a more convenient time, which never came.

**Acts 24:22-27**

“And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter. And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him. And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee. He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him. But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix’ room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound” (Acts 24:22-27).

Paul spent the last four years of his life bound in chains. However, his circumstances did not slow him down. Paul continued to preach and testify to whoever would listen. He also wrote letters to the churches.

One that listened was Felix. Paul spoke to him about faith in Christ. “And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.” Paul’s preaching convicted Felix, but the governor procrastinated. He said, “Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.” A “convenient season” never came for Felix. He sinned away his day of salvation.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (II Corinthians 6:2).

After two years, Antonius Felix was recalled by Rome, and Porcius Festus took his place. He appeared to be more proactive than his predecessor was. For example, after only three days in office he made an official trip to Jerusalem to meet with the Jewish council.

## Acts 25:1-6

“Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem. Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him, and desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him. But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither. Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him. And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Caesarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought” (Acts 25:1-6).

The corrupt high priest asked if Paul could be returned to Jerusalem for a hearing, hoping to revive their two-year-old plot to assassinate him en route. But Festus told the council that if they wanted to have another hearing, they could journey back to Caesarea. Without Festus realizing it, God was using him to protect Paul and the church.

## Acts 25:7-12

“And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove. While he answered for himself, neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all. But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me? Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar. Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go” (Acts 25:7-12).

At this new hearing, the Jews merely repeated the same unproven accusations against Paul, who reaffirmed his innocence. When Festus saw that he wasn't making any progress, he asked Paul if he would be willing to move the hearing to Jerusalem. Festus was trying to please the Jews and probably didn't realize that he would be placing the life of his prisoner in jeopardy. However, Paul exercised one of his rights as a Roman citizen for the second time—he appealed his case to Caesar Nero, which took it out of the hands of the Jews for good. And it also would provide transportation to Rome, at the expense of the Roman Empire.

### **Acts 25:13-21**

*“And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus. And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul’s cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix: about whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him. To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him. Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth. Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed: but had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters. But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Caesar” (Acts 25:13-21).*

Festus had one remaining problem. He couldn't send such a notable prisoner such as Paul to Caesar without legal charges against him. So he seized the opportunity to get help understanding the Jewish perspective when King Agrippa and his sister Bernice made an official state visit.

Herod Agrippa II was the great-grandson of Herod the Great who killed all the babies in Bethlehem, and the son of Herod Agrippa I who killed James in Acts 12. Rome also had given him jurisdiction over the Temple, so it was a logical choice to ask for his opinion on the matter. Besides, he himself wanted to hear from this man who had stirred up the Jewish nation.

### **Acts 25:22-27**

*“Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. To morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him. And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus’ commandment Paul was brought forth. And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer. But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him. Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write. For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him” (Acts 25:22-27).*

In his flowery introduction before King Agrippa, Festus indicated that he wanted the king to examine Paul. Festus was certain that Agrippa, with his knowledge of Jewish religion, could find something with which to charge Paul and to send him on to Caesar. However, there is no record that Agrippa ever did interrogate Paul.

### **Acts 26:1-3**

*“Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself: I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: especially because I know thee to be expert in*

all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently” (Acts 26:1-3).

Instead of questioning Paul, Agrippa stated, “Thou art permitted to speak for thyself.”

Paul certainly did defend himself, but at the same time, he presented the truth of the gospel in the longest of his speeches found in Acts. This was the third and final time Paul gave his testimony in Acts. Before it was over, we get the distinct impression that Paul became the judge, and Festus, King Agrippa, and Bernice became the defendants.

Paul made five key statements that summarized his defense.

### **Acts 26:4-11: “I lived a Pharisee”**

“My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion *I lived a Pharisee*. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope’s sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities” (Acts 26:4-11, emphasis added).

Paul’s defense was not about right or wrong. He wasn’t so concerned as whether he would be released from prison. His concern was that the gospel be preached in simplicity and power. Therefore, he began with a summary of his old life as a persecutor of the church.

From his youth, Paul had followed the teaching of the strictest sect of Judaism. He was a Pharisee. He was a religious man, lauded by the Jews for his piety. He was a student of the Law and taught the promises of God, including the hope of the resurrection, for which hope the Jews accused him. Paul asked, "Why should it be thought a strange thing that God would raise the dead?"

Twenty-first-century Apostolics, why should it seem incredible that God can heal a broken body, or that God can break the shackles of an addiction, or that God can mend a broken limb, or that God can raise the dead? Why should it seem unbelievable? That's just the God we serve. If Jesus could raise Himself from the dead and break out of a tomb on that first Easter Sunday morning, then surely He can still heal and deliver and raise the dead. Why should it seem so incredible in our day? That's just the God we serve.

Paul confessed he had done many things against the name of Jesus. Having received authority from the high priest, he persecuted and imprisoned many who believed in the resurrected Lord in both Jerusalem and foreign cities. Because of Paul's testimony against them, many were killed violently. Through intimidation and torture, he forced others to blaspheme. Because of Paul's zeal against the Christians, the Jews had esteemed him.

### **Acts 26:12-13: "I saw in the way a light"**

"Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, *I saw in the way a light* from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me" (Acts 26:12-13, emphasis added).

While Paul was on his way to attack the Christians in Damascus, he saw a great light. Since then millions have shared Paul's experience. They have seen the light of the gospel and it has led them from their darkness.

### **Acts 26:14-18: "I heard a voice"**

"And when we were all fallen to the earth, *I heard a voice* speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.



And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" (Acts 26:14-18, emphasis added).

Paul and his company all fell to the ground. Then Paul heard a voice from Heaven calling him by name in Hebrew. The voice asked, "Why do you persecute me? Why do you kick against the goads [a pointed stick used to prod cattle]?"

When Paul began to listen, his life began to change. He asked, "Who are you, Master?" Imagine Paul's distress, self-loathing, and fright when the voice replied, "I am Jesus!" Think of the guilt and shame that swept over Paul as he quaked in fear, expecting harsh judgment. Instead, Jesus was calling Paul to a life of ministry to Gentiles, "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me."

The word *minister* in Acts 26:16 means "an under-rower" and refers to a lowly servant on a galley ship. Paul had been accustomed to being an honored leader, but after his conversion, he became a subordinate worker; and Jesus Christ became his Master. No doubt, it was a surprise to Paul after his conversion to hear that the Lord was sending him to the Gentiles. He had a great love for his own people and would gladly have lived and died to win them to Christ (Romans 9:1-3), but that was not God's plan. Paul would always be "the apostle to the Gentiles."

### **Acts 26:19-21: "I was not disobedient"**

"Whereupon, O king Agrippa, *I was not disobedient* unto the heavenly vision: but shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for

repentance. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me” (Acts 26:19-21, emphasis added).

Paul was not disobedient to the heavenly voice and went throughout Damascus, Jerusalem, the coast of Judea, to the Gentiles preaching that Jesus was alive and everyone should repent. His preaching about Jesus inflamed the Jews and caused his arrest for the trumped-up charge of him profaning the Temple.

In spite of repeated discouragements and dangers, Paul had remained obedient to the call and the vision that Jesus Christ gave him. He said, “But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear” (Acts 20:24).

### **Acts 26:22-23: “I continue unto this day”**

“Having therefore obtained help of God, *I continue unto this day*, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:22-23, emphasis added).

In spite of the beatings, storms, shipwrecks, imprisonments, and other discouragements, Paul knew that he had obtained help from God. Therefore, he continued to preach the gospel unto everyone that would listen. He continued to do what God called him to do. It is one thing to have a great beginning, with visions and voices, but quite another thing to keep on going, especially when the going is tough. Such was the determination of the apostle Paul.

Paul’s life illustrates that having a good beginning is wonderful, but having a good ending is better.

This should be everyone’s brief testimony:

- I lived according to God’s law.
- I saw in the way a light.
- I heard a voice.
- I was not disobedient.
- I continue unto this day.

Paul had been addressing King Agrippa, but the strong conviction in the room caused the governor Festus to cry out . . . .

### **Acts 26:24-26**

“And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner” (Acts 26:24-26).

Paul disputed Festus’s charge that he was mad. He said, *“This thing was not done in a corner.”* If the resurrection of Jesus had been false, the message of the church would never have been able to gain a foothold in Jerusalem. Festus knew this. And Paul knew that he knew.

### **Acts 26:27-32**

“King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds. And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them: and when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar” (Acts 26:27-32).

When Paul asked if Agrippa believed the prophets, he was forcing him to take a stand. Certainly, the king would not repudiate what every Jew believed. But Agrippa knew that if he affirmed his faith in the prophets, he must then face the question, “Is Jesus of Nazareth the one about whom the prophets wrote?” So Agrippa tried to evade the question: *“Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.”* Whether he was being sarcastic or sincere, we do not know.

*Almost.* Agrippa went to Hell for one word. *Almost.* If you remove that one word from Agrippa's confession it changes everything, but there's no such thing as an "Almost Christian." Can you imagine Agrippa in Hell uttering one word over and over throughout eternity? *Almost . . . .*

Philip P. Bliss's song "Almost Persuaded" states,

Almost now is always never.  
Almost Heaven is always Hell.  
Almost saved is always lost.  
*Almost persuaded.*

"Almost persuaded" now to believe;  
"Almost persuaded" Christ to receive;  
Seems now some soul to say,  
"Go, Spirit, go Thy way,  
Some more convenient day  
On Thee I'll call."

"Almost persuaded," come, come today;  
"Almost persuaded," turn not away;  
Jesus invites you here,  
Angels are lingering near,  
Prayers rise from hearts so dear;  
O wanderer, come!

"Almost persuaded," harvest is past!  
"Almost persuaded," doom comes at last!  
"Almost" cannot avail;  
"Almost" is but to fail!  
Sad, sad, that bitter wail –  
"Almost," but lost!  
(Published 1871, in public domain)

Paul responded to Agrippa, "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds."

Agrippa's conclusion vindicated Paul. Paul could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.

## What Have You Learned?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. Identify:
  - A. Ananias \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. Tertullus \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. Festus \_\_\_\_\_
  - D. Agrippa \_\_\_\_\_
  - E. Bernice \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. What charges did Tertullus bring against Paul?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
3. How did Paul's life reflect his statement, "all things to all men that I might win some"?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
4. What is heresy?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
5. Was Paul guilty of heresy? Why or why not?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. Why did Felix keep Paul in prison when he knew Paul was innocent?

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7. Why did Paul appeal to Caesar?

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8. Quote Felix's response to Paul's testimony.

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9. Why did Felix want Agrippa to hear Paul?

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10. Quote Agrippa's response to Paul's testimony.

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11. What were the five points of Paul's testimony?

- A. \_\_\_\_\_
- B. \_\_\_\_\_
- C. \_\_\_\_\_
- D. \_\_\_\_\_
- E. \_\_\_\_\_

## Lesson 24

# Acts 27:1-28:31

### Recap

*Many scholars believe that Luke wrote the Book of Acts as evidence for Paul's eventual trial before Caesar Nero. That's why he continually accumulated "official statements" to prove Paul was innocent:*

- *Claudius Lysias to Antonius Felix: "Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds" (Acts 23:29).*
- *Porcius Festus to King Agrippa: "But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him" (Acts 25:25).*
- *After Paul's final trial: "And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar" (Acts 26:31-32).*

*Since Agrippa said Paul could have been released if he hadn't appealed to Caesar, was Paul wrong in appealing to the emperor? No, Paul knew that his final destination was Rome, the greatest city of the empire. (See Acts 19:21.) Whether as a prisoner or under his own power, Paul trusted God to get him there. He wanted to go there to preach the gospel. His appeal to Caesar was the mechanism that finally allowed him to go to Rome.*

### Acts 27:1-8

*"And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a*

centurion of Augustus' band. And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us. And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself. And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein. And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone; and, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The fair havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea" (Acts 27:1-8).

Luke ("we") and Aristarchus rejoined Paul for his voyage to Rome. Although no evidence indicates that either of them had been arrested, they were allowed to accompany him, giving up their liberty and no doubt risking their lives to help him. Later, Paul would even refer to Aristarchus as his "fellow prisoner" in Colossians 4:10. Of course, Paul was not the only prisoner that Julius and his soldiers were taking to Rome.

The centurion Julius found a coastal ship leaving Caesarea, so they embarked and covered the eighty miles to Sidon in one day. In Sidon, Julius permitted Paul to visit his friends. From Sidon to Myra, the voyage became difficult because of the contrary winds. At Myra, Julius found a ship going to Italy; so he abandoned the slower coastal ship and put Paul and the others on board this large grain ship from Egypt that carried two hundred seventy-six passengers (Acts 27:37-38). The strong winds again hindered their progress so that "many days" were required to cover the remainder of the journey. The ship finally made it to a port called Fair Havens.

### **Acts 27:9-13**

"Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them, and said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives. Nevertheless the centurion believed



the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul. And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west. And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete" (Acts 27:9-13).

The centurion now had to decide whether to winter at Fair Havens or set sail and try to reach the port of Phenice on the southern coast of Crete, about forty miles away. Paul admonished them to stay in Fair Havens. They had already encountered adverse winds, and it was now the start of the stormy season.

"The fast" (v. 9) refers to the Day of Atonement, which was in the fall. Every sailor knew that sailing was difficult during the fall months and impossible during the winter. Paul had already experienced three shipwrecks (II Corinthians 11:25), so he was certainly speaking from experience. However, Julius gave little value to Paul's warning, and lived to regret it. Instead, he listened to the captain and owner of the ship who wanted to get to Phenice's more sheltered harbor. They had already lost a lot of time (v. 9). The winds were favorable at that moment (v. 13). And after all, Phenice was only forty miles away.

However, the "soft wind" soon became "tempestuous" (from the same root word as "typhoon"). Sailors called this kind of storm "Euroclydon," which means "a northeasterner." It was impossible to steer the ship, so the crew simply had to let it drift—and the winds pushed it many miles off course. The crew did everything they could: they pulled in the small boat they towed behind, they wrapped ropes around the hull, they took down the sails, they threw their wheat cargo overboard, and finally they even started throwing the ship's furnishings overboard. As they couldn't see the sun or stars to even determine their position, their situation looked absolutely hopeless.

## **Acts 27:14-20**

"But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive. And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come

by the boat: which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven. And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship; and the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship. And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away" (Acts 27:14-20).

"We let her drive" means that the sailors sought shelter and allowed the wind and waves to batter the ship and take it wherever it would. They were totally at the mercy of the massive storm. The gale dashed to pieces their hopes to be saved.

The centurion Julius should have listened to Paul but instead followed the desire of the captain and boat owner, who wanted to hasten on their journey in order to sell the wheat. Their impatience led to disaster.

Sometimes we get ourselves into spiritual storms for the same reasons:

- Impatience
- Accepting "expert" advice that is contrary to God's will
- Following the majority
- Trusting "ideal" conditions

## **Acts 27:21-26**

"But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island" (Acts 27:21-26).

Paul finally stated the obvious: “You should have listened to me.” Paul began this journey as a prisoner, and ended up as a leader. He took over when it became obvious that nobody else knew what to do. But Paul had a word from God. After two weeks adrift, the ship was now more than five hundred miles off course, and they were still not out of danger. But God had given Paul a promise, and Paul knew everything would be all right.

Paul was simply trying to do God’s will. It is so incredibly important that we follow the will of God for our lives. The will of God will seldom be the will of the majority. The Bible says to beware when all men speak well of you. The will of God will seldom be a course that we can receive instantly. Many times it will take a lot of patience to get us where God wants us to be.

The will of God will never have ideal conditions. If you set out to follow ideal conditions, you often run away from the will of God. Jonah did it. Moses did it. So many others in the Bible did. And the men aboard Paul’s ship did it. But they should have listened to Paul.

Paul followed, “You should have listened to me,” with, “But be of good cheer for I have good news.” Paul’s good news was that he had heard from God and everything would be all right. Sure, they would shipwreck, but all lives would be saved.

As twenty-first-century Apostolics, we need to realize that God is with us through all storms. If God has a plan for your life, there’s not a devil in Hell, an attack of man, a trial so deep, or a night so dark that can prevent you from fulfilling your destiny that God has for you. If God has given you a promise, you can stand with confidence and with joy that He will bring it to pass.

## **Acts 27:27-32**

“But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country; and sounded, and found it twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms. Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day. And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under

colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved. Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off" (Acts 27:27-32).

At this point, the crew discovered that the water was getting shallower, indicating that land was near – and it appeared that the ship was headed straight for the rocks. In order to keep the prow headed toward the shore, they dropped four anchors from the stern. Some of the crew also tried to save themselves by fleeing in the small boat. However, Paul admonished the centurion that only those who stayed with the big ship would be saved, so they cut the smaller boat free before anyone could use it. They had to stay in the ship to be saved.

### **Acts 27:33-38**

"And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing. Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you. And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat. Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat. And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls. And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea" (Acts 27:33-38).

In their final attempt to get the ship to land safely, they ate something to keep up their strength, then threw the remaining cargo overboard to make the ship as light as possible, and headed toward the shoreline. However, the ship ran aground and began to break apart.

### **Acts 27:39-44**

"And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship. And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed

the rudder bands, and hoisted up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore. And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves. And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape. But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land: and the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land" (Acts 27:39-44).

When morning came, they saw a possible landing spot and headed toward a creek. However, they ran aground. The soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners, lest they should be held responsible for any who escaped. Nevertheless, the centurion wanted to save Paul and refrained from killing the prisoners. Instead, he commanded those that could swim to jump in and swim to the shore. Others made it to shore with the help of planks and other parts of the ship. All made it safely to land.

Why would Luke spend an entire chapter on a storm? Could it be that he was teaching us that *even the worst storms in life cannot hinder the purposes of God?* Although the decisions and the unbelief of others affected Paul's *comfort*, his ultimate *destiny* remained unchanged. And in the middle of the storm, God used him as a witness to all those around him. In fact, all of the prisoners would have died at the hands of the soldiers, had it not been for the influence of Paul. So just as Paul had prophesied, every soul on board was spared, and they washed up on the shores of the island of Malta.

## **Acts 28:1-10**

"And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita. And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold. And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer,

whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god. In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously. And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him. So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed: who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary" (Acts 28:1-10).

To the Greeks, anybody who did not speak Greek was a "barbarian," but these island people proved to be kind and sympathetic, even kindling a fire to warm the shipwrecked sailors and prisoners.

As Paul was putting more wood on the fire, a snake bit him. He simply flung the snake into the fire. The superstitious islanders first believed that their gods had punished Paul by having a snake bite him; but then they believed he was a god when he didn't fall dead.

Over the next three months, the whole island experienced Paul's ministry, including the father of Publius, the chief man of the island. The islanders honored Paul and gave the group all kinds of gifts ("with such things as were necessary").

## **Acts 28:11-16**

"And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux. And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days. And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli: where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome. And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii

forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage. And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him" (Acts 28:11-16).

We don't know for sure if all 276 people boarded the Alexandrian ship, or just Julius and his prisoners. In Greek mythology, "Castor and Pollux" were the names of the twin sons of Zeus and were revered as the protectors of men on the sea. Many Roman ships bore their image. This time a "south wind" was exactly what the ship needed in order to make the voyage quickly and safely. Once they got to Puteoli, the centurion allowed Paul to stay with some believers for a week before continuing.

Somehow, word had gotten to the believers in Rome that Paul was coming. Julius and his party took the famous Appian Way and traveled 125 miles from Puteoli to Rome. One group of Christians met Paul at the Forum of Appius. A second group met him at the Three Taverns. Paul was greatly encouraged by their presence. While the soldiers delivered many of the prisoners to a common prison, because Paul was something of a "political prisoner," guards put him under "house arrest" while he awaited his trial before Caesar Nero. (Some historians claim that Paul's guards were changed every six hours and many became believers in Christ.)

## **Acts 28:17-22**

"And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me. But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of. For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain. And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee. But we desire to hear of thee

what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against" (Acts 28:17-22).

Even though Paul was apart from the other prisoners and had his own house, he was still a prisoner with limited freedom. He called for the Jewish elders in Rome and explained that his appeal to Caesar was not an indictment against his nation, merely a defense against the false accusations made by some of the Jews in Jerusalem. They hadn't heard about Paul's troubles, but they had certainly heard about the new sect of people called "Christians." They wanted to know Paul's opinion, and arranged a time to have him address a larger group.

### **Acts 28:23-29**

"And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves" (Acts 28:23-29).

After an entire day explaining that Jesus was the fulfillment of everything written in the law of Moses and the writings of the prophets, some of the Jews believed and some refused Paul's message. That is when Paul quoted Isaiah's prophecy about the Jewish nation having dull ears, closed eyes, and unbelieving hearts. Because the Jews for the most part wouldn't receive their own Messiah, God was now sending His salvation message to the Gentiles—and Paul said, "They will hear it!"



## Acts 28:30-31

“And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, *no man forbidding him*” (Acts 28:30-31, emphasis added).

The Book of Acts ends awkwardly and abruptly, because Paul was left under house arrest, guarded by soldiers, waiting again for more than two years for his case to be tried by Caesar. And we know from history that Nero eventually had him beheaded. That certainly was not a happy ending.

In English, Acts ends with four words: “no man forbidding him.” In the Greek language, Acts ends with this single word, *akolutos*. Biblical scholar I. Howard Marshall writes that “all the emphasis lies on that last phrase.” The word means “unhindered,” “unpreventable,” and even “unstoppable.” It suggests a wide-open field of opportunity.

Let’s get this straight—Paul was chained to a Roman soldier, forcibly confined to his lodgings, and had been awaiting trial for several years—and Luke wrote that he was “unstoppable”? *Is this God’s idea of irony?* Paul immobilized by Roman chains doesn’t exactly seem like a promising strategy for accomplishing the mission of the church.

*Unstoppable?* He can’t even leave his house. And meanwhile, Emperor Nero, who was on one of his rampages, was martyring Christians wholesale in the city. Paul would soon be included in the killings, beheaded for the name of Jesus. *Unstoppable?* Many of the newer Bible translations pick up on this term by saying something like “no one *tried* to stop him.” But that is not the point—no one *could* stop Paul, because God was with him even though he was in chains.

Luke understood something that you need to understand. All of the judicial foot-dragging that had Paul mired in prison, the religious blindness that had caused the Jews to reject their own Messiah, even the massacres that filled Rome’s coliseums with Christian corpses . . . none of these qualify as hindrances against the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Why? Because the church in Acts was *unstoppable*. You could fight those Christians, persecute them, throw them to the lions, burn them at the stake, fill

the catacombs with their bones—but you could not stop them. They were determined to turn the world upside down, and they did. They absolutely changed the world—and we are called to follow in their steps. We believe the same gospel; we preach the same message; we have the same commission and the same Holy Spirit as Peter, Paul, James, John, Barnabbas, Silas, Timothy, and the rest. We can do what they did! And so, *unstoppable* stands as the last word on the subject.

While in chains, Paul wrote: “For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak” (Ephesians 6:20). His prayer was for boldness not for deliverance. His priority was still to preach the gospel. To the Philippians, he wrote:

“But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; and many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear” (Philippians 1:12-14).

Paul’s example speaks loud and clear to we who have followed: “If Paul can live for God in prison, then I can live for God in my situation.”

In his final letter, written to his young protégé Timothy, Paul let us know that he didn’t expect a miraculous deliverance this time:

“For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (II Timothy 4:6-8).

However, years of trials, trouble, and persecution did not sour Paul’s attitude about the power of the gospel that he preached: “Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound” (II Timothy 2:9).

There is another reason that the Book of Acts ends awkwardly and abruptly. It’s because the Book of Acts is not supposed to have an ending. The

church that God purchased with His own blood, the church that the gates of Hell cannot prevail against, the church that began on the Day of Pentecost, has never been killed or even defeated. The head of the church, Jesus Christ, is still alive and moving in His church.

Paul died, but the church didn't die. His story ended in Acts 28, but the church's story continues today, because *we* are in the same church. *You and I are writing "Acts 29" with our lives. Let's make it good.*

## What Have You Learned?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. Identify
  - A. Fair Havens \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. Phenice \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. Melita \_\_\_\_\_
  - D. Syracuse \_\_\_\_\_
  - E. Appian Forum \_\_\_\_\_
  - F. Three Taverns \_\_\_\_\_
  - G. Rome \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. Describe Julius's treatment of his prisoner Paul.  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Why didn't Julius heed Paul's advice to remain at Fair Havens?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
4. What is Euroclydon?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. What does “the fast” refer to in Acts 27:9?

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6. What steps did the sailors take to avoid shipwreck?

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7. What was the angel of God’s message to Paul?

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8. What lesson should twenty-first-century Apostolics learn from Paul’s shipwreck? \_\_\_\_\_

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9. How long did the storm batter Paul’s ship?

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10. How did the ship’s crew know they were nearing land?

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11. What was Paul’s message to the centurion and crew regarding abandoning the ship? \_\_\_\_\_

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12. How did the islanders treat the shipwrecked sailors and prisoners?

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13. How long were Paul and company on the island of Melita?

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14. What happened to Paul after he reached Rome?

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15. Why did Paul quote Isaiah during his final meeting with the Jews?

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16. How long did Paul dwell in his hired house in Rome?

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17. Write a paragraph stating why unstoppable is a fitting conclusion to the Book of Acts.

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## Missionary Spotlight: Rev. and Mrs. Kenneth Wendell

### BLESSED AND BROKEN

By Bobby Wendell

“When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart: and when the people had heard thereof, they followed him on foot out of the cities. And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick. And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals. But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes. He said, Bring them hither to me. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he *blessed*, and *brake*, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full. And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children. And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone” (Matthew 14:13-23, emphasis added).

“Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God” (Psalm 68:31).



The Kenneth Wendell Family c.1971

It was a very cold evening of December 3, 1932, in East Texas, an area of farming community and some oilfield activity. In the very large and mostly empty farmhouse, a young, sixteen-year-old mother-to-be awaited delivery of her first child. Her husband, a sharecrop farmer at the time, waited with her. The only heat was a fireplace and a wood stove. The house stood at the top of a tall hill and faced a millpond

where local corn crops and other grains would be ground for use. The father-to-be was twenty years of age. Word went out by bells and wagons. Help was on the way.

The elderly doctor, patient, slow, and not to be rushed, attended and delivered a loud and healthy child, Bobbye Jean Blizzard. The midwife was the grandmother of the newborn.

A few miles south in Vivian, Louisiana, on September 16, 1930, another young mother-to-be awaited her first child. The child was born healthy, strong and heavy, over twelve pounds. The mother had celebrated her fifteenth birthday on September 14. The baby was born two days later. Chester and Inez Wendell welcomed Kenneth Chester Wendell.

The Great Depression was on and times were very hard. Cornbread and syrup made a good breakfast. Manual labor was needed to store crops for winter, but was sometimes many miles away. Walking was the means of travel. Wages were fifty cents a day.

Fast forward a few years and the parents of the baby girl moved from East Texas to Oil City in North Louisiana. My father had taught himself auto mechanics. He went to work at the Ford Motor Co. By this time there were two young daughters, my sister and me. The house we moved into was just across the road from the Pentecostal Church pastored by Bernard Echols, a great-uncle. My mother received the Holy Ghost and was baptized. She later left the church for a while but returned to serve out her life in the Oil City United Pentecostal Church. My dad later received the Holy Ghost at eighty-one years of age, after years of prayers by my mom. I was honored to baptize him.



The church in Oil City was pastored by Samuel Baker, who was later a missionary to Brazil, A. D. Varnado, who was later missionary to Jamaica, and other great men at various times. The mission spirit was resident in the church. Sam Baker moved the church building from Lake Community to State Highway 1, which was a very good move.

Years passed. My sister, Billie, and I were very active in school and we all enjoyed the birth of a baby brother, Noah Blizzard, named after my dad. There are so many good memories of school years in Oil City, Louisiana.

In 1949, a skating rink was built in Vivian, Louisiana. The baby boy born in 1930, Kenneth Wendell, was now a tall, dark, handsome young man who was the floor bouncer at the skating rink. We met, we liked each other, and we skated away to be married August 23, 1949—the football player and the cheerleader. He was eighteen; I was sixteen. We lived and worked in an oilfield community. We were blessed with four children. However, we did not serve God.

We later joined a denominational church. Ironically, as our lives later began to fall apart, it was the denominational pastor who told me that I would never be happy until I turned my life to Pentecostalism. It was in this broken condition that Kenneth and I began our turnaround toward truth and our call to missions.

The church in Oil City had gone through some hard times. The church had suffered. After the church was without a pastor for a while, a young L. S. Marcus and his wife became pastors. They had four children. He purposed to build back and have a restorative revival. The ladies made donuts and raised funds to build on Sunday school rooms. The prayer room resounded with fervor and intercession. Excitement was in the air. God was on the move. Zion was broken and travailing for sons and daughters. For three years, they prayed and waited.

In the process of running from God, Kenneth and I did not understand that the broken heart of Zion was reaching out her long arms to bring us to meet our God and future. There were long roads from one job to another. We were like silent children, not understanding the pressures. We moved north to Kentucky. Memories stand out: The boss at Kenneth's job saying, "Bobbye, Kenneth is sick; take him home." And my crying out, "Where is home?" And in the most frightening moment, trying to hold strong, I heard me answer myself. "I will sing, yes, I will sing." And as I tried, the brokenness fell over me. I sobbed. I could not sing. There was no song. God gives the song. Without God, there is no song. We had miles, miles to "home." Yet in every place, every hamlet, and

town, there were signs that announced, "Apostolic Church, 1 mile," "Pentecostal Church, 3 blocks," all on our search for home.

There was no money, no job, and no home. To help us, a man whose wife was Pentecostal let us move into a small apartment. You could look out the kitchen window and see the Pentecostal Church. Our two older children stayed with their grandparents. The two younger children, four years and fifteen months, stayed with us. Kenneth was very sick and required constant care.

One Friday morning I was awake, looked out, and saw lights at the church kitchen window. I walked out into the November night and walked down to the church. I observed through the windows as those women worked with love and happiness as they made donuts, prayed, and sang at 3:00 AM. I saw myself. I felt ashamed. I felt sorrow. I felt fear. I turned, weeping and headed back to the simple apartment.

That Saturday night, the lights were on again. Beware the church where lights are seldom on! Again, there was activity. The lot had many cars, yet none of them new. This was mostly a minimum wage oilfield. I watched, wondering what was going on. That night, late in the night, I awoke to find Kenneth out of the bed. At first, I could not find him. When I did, and I touched him, he began to weep, saying, "We are lost, Bobbye." "No!" I cried, "We are not. We are here. I know where we are." "You do not understand," he said. "We are lost without God."

Earlier, that Saturday evening, Brother Glen Bogue, a missionary to Australia, had spoken at the church. The pastor had said, "Give an offering to this man and his mission field tonight." The church prayed, asking God to speak to sinners and to send laborers into the field. God heard, and He answered.

The next day, November 15, 1959, had been chosen as the day the revival would begin, and the pastor would be the evangelist. The service the night before was spectacular. Many were stirred, given to prayer, and anxiously awaited the next day. The missionaries had traveled to another service, but the aura of the night before still hovered over on this Sunday morning.

On Sunday morning, troubled over the things happening that seemed out of control, I stood at the kitchen window of the apartment. I saw the Pentecostals gathering in. Suddenly I whirled around and started getting things ready for church, my mom's church. Kenneth asked what I was doing and I told him,

“Getting ready for church.” With the two children ready and Kenneth so very sick, we walked out and began walking down that narrow and muddy road.

The pastor was standing in the church kitchen gazing on the people gathering and remembering the power of the previous evening. As he looked toward a narrow, unpaved road, he noticed a couple with a child in arms and another, a young girl about four. He wondered, “Are they coming here? Could they be a result of the lifeline cast out last evening? Who are they? I will give them time to arrive at the entrance of the church, and I will meet them when they come in.”

We walked in and sat in the back. The pastor came, shook hands, and finally recognized us. Sin had taken a toll. The pastor turned toward the front of the church. I saw him weeping. I knew it was for us. The old-fashioned, up-front-platform choir started singing A. L. Clanton’s Song, “My Thanks to Him.” Conviction like a river, a weariness of the world, our own situation, all fell over me. I ran to the altar. I did not know, but Kenneth was just behind me. I received the Holy Ghost that morning. We were baptized that evening. My dear husband, Kenneth Wendell, received the Holy Ghost the next evening. The expected revival after the mission service exploded over the church. The net had been cast—intercession, brokenness, hunger, sacrifice, and it had fallen squarely over us.



Bobbye Wendell, c. 1978

The mission-burden aura remained. My first prayer meeting, Monday morning, showed me a huge world spinning in place and I would respond to cry out for this spinning, lost world. Brother Wendell still needed healing, and soon he was also feeling this need to do service. The Lord began a healing process in our lives over the following two years.

During my first fast, which was five days, and just a few weeks after receiving the Holy Ghost, I was drawn to Psalm 68:31, “Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.” Ethiopia—but where was it?

We worked, prayed, and worked some more. We sacrificed, reaching out with our hearts to missions. So many projects, cookbooks, snow cones, chocolate candy, Sheaves for Christ, and many more, were completed with our aim to help missions. Our families had multi-colored hands and shoes from snow-cone drippings, all for missions. We would crawl under the bench in front of us to pray after a missionary would speak, and we prayed for a few dollars to give to missions.

After several years in the local church, we felt a need to attend Bible school in order to better prepare ourselves for missions. God had definitely called us and we were ready to prepare. Our pastor felt it was time for us to go to Bible school, and Texas Bible College had opened the previous year. This would be our destination. We had the desire, but no finances to make the change. We packed our things in cardboard boxes, stacked them in the middle of the living room, and borrowed an old cattle trailer to place our things in for the move.

Brother Wendell called our children, two boys and two girls, and we knelt together on the living room floor and started to pray for help to make the trip. As we prayed, the Lord impressed me to read from the Bible. I read about Abraham as God directed him to leave his country in God's will. We wept and rejoiced and continued packing.

Soon a knock came to the door and someone stood there saying, "I want to help." He gave us twenty dollars. Immediately after he left another person came and brought one hundred dollars. This was enough to get us to Houston and to pay half of a month's rent. God provided jobs and Brother Wendell and I found ourselves enrolling in Texas Bible College. It was a wonderful experience. I hope Bible school means as much to all who attend as it meant to us.

In October 1966, we were appointed as missionaries to Ethiopia, while yet students. The timing was extremely important and divinely accomplished by God's hand. He is perfect. We then had the process of deputation to fulfill.

Our deputation would become a two-year ordeal of awaiting visas for entrance into Ethiopia. It would be a difficult project, especially for Pentecostals. A great spiritual awakening was inside Ethiopia, and many young people were receiving the Holy Ghost. There was not any revelation of Jesus' name prior to our arrival that we ever actually found. We met no one who had been baptized correctly. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, or state church, moved quickly to stop this awakening. Great persecution followed.

During the two years of waiting, we again faced a great trial. Brother Wendell was in an auto accident, and I was told he would probably not recover. If he did recover, he would likely not ever walk without help. I found a place of prayer in the hospital. As I poured out our need again, God was faithful to answer. Great visitation of God's help and presence surrounded us and our call was confirmed again by Brother Wendell walking out of the hospital aided by crutches, and only for a while. We were again on our way toward Ethiopia.

In November 1968, Brother Wendell left for Ethiopia. His visa came through before the children's and mine. It was difficult to see him go but there was much to do before the children and I would leave in January 1969. He wrote almost every day and we at home anxiously awaited our permission to enter Ethiopia. We shared our last Christmas in the U.S.A. for a while with family and friends and prepared our things for departure. We left Houston and the Texas Bible College president, Fred Foster, and other personnel and students saw us off. My parents were so broken, for they expected us to be gone from four to six years, which is a long time to be away from grandchildren.

During the weeks he was in Ethiopia before our coming, Brother Wendell stayed at the YMCA. During this stay he met many students of a technical college who frequented the YMCA to participate in several programs it offered. Those students took part in numerous projects that the school had approved to help the poor and needy of Ethiopia. One of these projects was an area where victims of Hansen's disease, leprosy, lived. Leprosy causes the nerves to die. With loss of feeling, body extremities, such as hands, feet, and nose, are damaged.

It would be impossible to describe fully the living conditions of those "untouchables." The lepers crowded together in submission to their rejection by society. They functioned within their declared boundaries as normally as possible. They were born; they lived, married, gave birth, and died just as humanity does. They created for themselves a culture and society of their own acceptance of each other. They could not enter the grounds or building of the orthodox state church, for their disease branded them. The evidence of leprosy physically marked them. Some slept in holes dug into the ground, some in shacks made of cardboard and pieces of tin and wood. Society had truly rejected them, but God had a plan that would be revealed to give these people a glimpse of His love. Brother Wendell was invited to be a part of the group who would attempt to improve the living quarters of these tragic people.

The long flight took us through New York, Rome, and on to Ethiopia. I cannot describe the feeling of landing in a strange land among a strange people and language and yet feeling as if I had come home. The children and I landed in Ethiopia at a northern city called Asmara. We did not deplane but quickly flew on to Addis Ababa where we were reunited with Brother Wendell. It was good to have the family back together.

The next day Brother Wendell wanted to show me the project he had been working on. We left the children to rest and drove over to the area. I stayed in the vehicle while Brother Wendell went over an embankment and out of sight. People began to gather, pushing close to the open window. They wore white, gauzy shawls draped around them and across their faces. I noticed they had deformed hands or no fingers and sometimes no hands, only stubs at the end of their arms. I froze with absolute fear when the shawls were lowered; some of them had disfigured faces, no eyebrows, and the nose almost gone. I had never seen anything in my life to prepare me for this. I prayed for Brother Wendell to return. When he did walk back over the embankment, several of the men surrounded him. He was laughing and saying strange words I could not understand. I wondered how he could be so happy in this surrounding. I found out much later.

Still smiling, Brother Wendell climbed into the car and started telling me what he was doing, but I told him I wanted to go home. He stopped laughing, looked at me, and said, "We are home, Bobbye. We prayed for nine years to get here. We are home and these people are those that God has given us to start with. If there is a church in Ethiopia, it will start here." I feebly told him I just wanted to go where the children were, to the house. I was up all night, visiting the rooms of my children and asking God and myself "What have I done?"

The next day, Brother Wendell insisted we all go back to the project. The children were still adjusting to the culture—they were about to find out what shock really was. We put huge plastic buckets on top of our Land Rover jeep. When we had tied them down, we all loaded in and drove away. The buckets were for collecting food scraps from the back door of the Hilton Hotel. Brother Wendell had arranged for the gift of this food that hotel residents left on their plates after finishing. This would be used to feed very hungry people.

We arrived at the assigned place. Planks lay over sawhorses to make tables. The buckets were placed on the tables. The people began to line up. Their food containers were tin cans, dirty rags, and plastic bags—whatever they could

find. They pushed against each other to be first in line to insure there would be something for them. The noise was terrible – shouting, pushing children crying, everyone making noise of some kind.

My two daughters, Angie and Jeannie, were to dip out the food with large spoons. They looked so beautiful that day, with their long hair around their faces and tears washing down from fear and pity. No one spoke a word all the way back home. Even Chet, our youngest, who was only nine, said nothing. Our eldest, Mark, quietly sat sheltering his little brother. When we arrived at the house, I started talking, trying to make the atmosphere lighter. I said I would make a special supper. They each said, “I do not want anything to eat. I just want to see my Mamaw and Papaw.” There was no evening meal, but there were many tears that night.

Closed off from the bedrooms to prevent disturbing our children, I cried and prayed though the night. Several times I visited their beds very gently laying my hand on each one and praying, “None of these diseases. Oh, Lord! . . . None of these diseases!”

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church was the state church. Its impact was represented in governmental affairs. In order to perform a religious work, the Ethiopian government required of us a project, either social or educational, in order to remain in the country. We were only allowed to preach in certain areas, as dictated by the government. To fulfill this requirement, we rented an old building on a large compound. We dug a hole in the front yard, extracted the dirt, and mixed it with straw bought from off of the donkeys’ backs as they trotted past the gate with their drivers. We made *chica* and repaired the broken walls.

This building would house our Leper Workshop and Training Center. We hired teachers who would teach cloth weaving, basket weaving, and rug weaving during the day. The workshop would also house our chapel to be used for daily devotions for the students before classes. Our church services and evangelistic outreach would be our first such building other than our home.

Those victims of leprosy, who were actually beggars on the streets during the day, began to line up at the gate of the workshop chapel, asking for entrance into the program. The disease ravaged some; others were not so horribly scarred. I don’t know how they found out the workshop was open, but they came, sometimes lining up down the hill to the river, awaiting an opportunity to come in. There were 500,000 people with leprosy in Ethiopia. There was no end.

Brother Wendell designed and made a prosthesis that strapped onto the wrist to the arm, elbow to wrist, including the palm portion of the hand. This would enable the wearer to hold a tool with which to work.

However, one woman who begged for a place in the school or training center had no hands, only stubs on her two wrists. Because she did not have any palms, she could not wear the prosthesis. The front parts of her feet were gone, leaving only the heel and ankle area. She could only shuffle instead of being able to walk. In order to keep balance, the woman stuffed the front parts of old boots with rags. Brother Wendell told her she could come to the chapel and church services but could not be in the training school.

She began to weep and look about her. She begged for someone to bring her a broom. We all stood there, awestruck at her intensity. She clutched the broom between her arms and began to stab at the ground with it in a sweeping motion. She slid her feet forward in the clumsy boots, not lifting the boot for fear of it sliding off. Slide . . . slide . . . sweep . . . sweep and crying and saying, "But sir, don't you see, I am worth something."

And she was . . . as is any creation of God, even those who are lepers. And there were hundreds to thousands of these people. We made an exception for this woman. She was placed. Later in a church service, she asked if she could sing. Her nose was deformed and her speech was affected. She sang, "God Is So Good to Me" – not the song written here in the U.S.A. I am sure it was one that she made up as she sang.

After ten months and no one yet baptized, I was desperate for God to mine this diamond field of humanity. We had 7:30 AM chapel services five days a week – many days of training, making a hot meal of lentil porridge and native bread for the students and workers, and even washing the feet of those who had ulcers so severely on their feet. Brother Wendell had huge pans for this. He would wash the feet of the men and put salve on them and bind them. The binding would be saturated the next day to be done over again. We learned what it means to minister.

We secured a teacher, from within the lepers, who would teach the children of the leper families. The students sat on the ground under trees using pieces of charcoal to write on pieces of wood as their writing materials. The days were all used up. Evening was welcomed each day. The longing for harvest in this land became unbearably heavy. Something had to happen.



On the mission field, it is essential to have help in your home. Some things are very primitive and require much manual labor. I needed someone to help me in my home. When Brother Wendell drove in one day with the smiling woman looking toward me from the back seat of the vehicle, I knew help had arrived. She was still smiling as he introduced her to me as Tsahi, which means “sun.” Her smile was that bright.

She would start in the kitchen. As she turned to enter the kitchen, I saw the huge ulcer on her leg. My heart sank and I looked at my husband. I walked out to the back room and asked him, “Does she have leprosy?” He looked squarely at me and said, “Yes.” I was horrified. In the house, with the children! This cannot be! I told him, “You have to take her away.” He said he could not; she had no place to go and would be hurt again. Other beggars had beaten her terribly. I told him very emphatically that she had to go. He sadly looked at me and said, “You may take her . . . here are the keys . . . but will you do something for us?” I asked what it was that he wanted. He asked if I would go by Calvary on the way taking her back.

I was numbed. Didn’t he know that I *had* been to Calvary? I had been there before, but it had been to take a soul to Calvary—not to lead one away. I started to cry. I took the keys and grabbed my prayer shawl. It was a nice little pink and green shawl made by someone in the Alexandria, Louisiana, church as a gift for me on the mission field. I used it every service in the chapel church. There were reasons I used it.

I flew out of the house but did not take the woman with me. It was time for something to happen for me. Today would be the day.

The drive to the workshop and chapel was not very far; it consisted of a road that wound down the mountainside and through the village market. The narrow road was crowded with people who seemed to have nothing to do. Every time we drove down without incident was either a tribute to our driving skills or a miracle. This day was no exception, and I arrived safely at the workshop.

It was Saturday. We did not have a Saturday service at this time. Only the guard, Wolde Gabriel, was there. He opened the gate to the property and I drove in. Wolde had very little of his nose left on his face. His eyes looked sad and a bit wary. He would wonder what I was doing there today. I drove past him to the front door of the building. I exited the car and went into the building. It was the same as the day before—nothing changed. The sameness was the smell.

When you have over one hundred people with various degrees of infection eating away at them . . . hands, feet, faces, and bodies . . . there is a cloying, clinging odor that permeates the area. This smell never goes away. Soap, disinfectant, and cleaners just added to the strength and tenacity of the smell. A smell of dying flesh—people whose desperate claim to life was: “God made me this way to test the rich man. If he gives me a coin, he escapes Hell, and I will have bread for the day.”

Do you blame them? They were told they had no soul. They could never inherit Heaven. And they were never allowed into the vast compounds of the existing state church. No one with physical handicap and no illegitimate person could enter the state church grounds. Many of these people would sit outside the compound of the state church, waiting for those participants to leave, hoping that the attendees would bless them. They sat there as beggars waiting for alms, just as those who sat at the Gate Beautiful in Acts 3. At the end of the day, these people would lie down with clawing hunger if they had not received alms. They felt they really were the grass of the field.

I went deeper into the building. The guard, Wolde, remained at the door. He held what remained of his hands behind his back. They were covered in ulcers. I never touched them. Today was no different. I took my prayer shawl and spread it on the floor. I would kneel on it, pray, and when I went home, I would throw it in the washer before using it again. I hoped it would last the length of our first term.

I started to kneel and quite firmly announced to the Lord that I had come to be “broken.” With that announcement, I went to my knees and started to pray. You do know that heavy smells actually can be tasted—and the smell was terrible that day.

I prayed. Nothing happened. After a while, as I attempted to get through, the Lord spoke to me and said, “If you really wish to have your request (to be broken) then remove the prayer shawl.” The thought of my flesh actually touching that floor was overwhelming. Some of the lepers walked barefoot daily over the floors, the smell of their infections entering the plank flooring. I could not do it. I prayed on. The voice came again: “Move the shawl.” Finally, I moved the shawl. But the Lord was not finished with me yet.

As I knelt, wondering if there was anything worthwhile in my fearful person, the Lord spoke again: “Get down.” I stooped a bit. The Lord spoke again:

“Go down,” and I stooped lower. Finally, after the third time I tearfully asked the Lord, “I’m down . . . how much further?” He said, “Until there is no further down.” I went down, stretched out on my face and frontal body.

I literally lay before the Lord with weeping. I would feel to turn my face but I would understand that I was to stay as I was. Something was happening. After some time—later to be judged about three hours—something like a dam broke on the inside of me. Fear of disease and strangeness and filth poured from me. From the lower regions of my body to the flowing out of sounds and words from my mouth, the Lord delivered me. I would never be the same again. There would be a harvest. There would be a church and a people.

Leprosy is a type of sin. We were in a house where lepers could enter and be ministered to. This was a victory. It was already in progress. As God prevailed in the prayer meeting that day and cast out the fear, He would prevail over the spiritual leprosy of sin. There would be fulfillment of Psalm 68:31, my Psalm 68:31, “Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.”

I arose as a new person and went out of the building. The guard simply looked at me. I said, “Wolde, give me your hands.” He held them behind his back. I asked him again and finally he extended them. I took his hands in mine and said to him, “You will never have to hide your hands from me again.” And he never did.

The foundation of the enemy’s resistance was broken that day and soon we would baptize our first Ethiopians in Jesus’ name. In those beginning days of harvest, there were twenty-seven leper people who were baptized in Jesus’ name and several received the Holy Ghost. Many other acts of God’s mercy were done and doors began to open to fulfill Psalm 68:31.

God’s will is accomplished the same today as it was on the dirt floor of Ethiopia. It is through the brokenness of our earthen vessels. One of the definitions of brokenness is separation by force. It is painful. It is denial of self. It is to go by Calvary. We are only blessed according to the level we allow ourselves to be broken before our Maker.