

Acts

Introduction

The four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John present the person the Lord Jesus Christ and His ministry of redemption, His resurrection and ascension to glory is the solid foundation upon which Christianity is built. The opening words clearly show that Luke was the author of the Book of Acts. The same Theophilus is addressed, and in the first chapter the story is resumed just at the point where the Gospel of Luke left off. The book of Acts is a continuation of His work, but in His servants, by the power of the Holy Spirit. This book is a history of the establishing Christianity throughout the world. The emphasis of the book of Acts is the means by which God gradually and positively introduced the new dispensation of Grace. The New Covenant of the blood of Jesus Christ replaced the Old Covenant communicated to Israel.

The beginning of the book describes the ministry of the twelve apostles still joined together with their nation of Israel. Then we see the conversion of Saul of Tarsus by the striking work of the Spirit of God. Saul is commissioned to spread the Gospel to the gentiles with the full concurrence of the other Apostles. Saul's name is changed to Paul and is given special revelations from God as to the heavenly characteristics of Christianity. The ministry of Paul will take the foremost place before the Book of Acts closes.

The Author of Acts

There is no argument that Luke wrote the Book of Acts. Luke wrote the third Gospel. Here in Acts Luke tells how the good news about Jesus Christ spread through Jerusalem and beyond.

Luke, who was a gentile, was a doctor. (Colossians 4:14) Luke worked and traveled with Paul. (Philemon 1:24)

Luke knew that all things being said about the events surrounding the Apostles were not true. Luke was very careful to write only that which he knew was the truth. The beginning of the Gospel of Luke we read this, "You have heard many things. I am writing this account so that you will know the truth about them" (Luke 1:4) in the Book of Acts Luke continued to maintain his accountability to the truth.

Luke traveled with Paul and wrote about what was happening during that time. (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16) In these verses, he used 'we' instead of 'they' or 'he'. So, we know that Luke was there at those times.

The Purpose of the Book of Acts

There is several reasons why Luke wrote the Book of Acts. There were many false stories about the Christians. The people that were telling these stories were afraid that the Christians wanted to cause trouble. Luke wanted the Roman authorities to know that this was not true. Christians helped people to behave well. Luke wanted to show the authorities that their practice was good for the Roman government.

Luke also wrote about the many miracles that God gave to the Christians such as the power to heal people. God rescued Peter from prison with a miracle. Anyone who opposed the Christians was opposing God. Luke also wanted to show that the Christian faith was not in opposition to Judaism but made their religion complete because Jesus was the Messiah.

One main reason Luke wrote this book was that the good news about Jesus had traveled from Jerusalem to Rome. The most important city in the world at the time was Rome. Luke wanted to show that the Christian faith was for every nation. The gospel was for the Jews and also for the gentiles.

The Theme

Every paragraph in this book is related the church witnessing for Christ. The author is continually concerned with the history of the early church. The description is not on local church organizations but a view of the unique body in which Jews and Gentiles were united on a perfect equality. The union of such had been intimated by Christ, (John 10:16) but the mystery of this body was not revealed until after His resurrection. (Ephesians 3:6) The book of Acts shows how this body came into being. Acts describes how the church gradually came for a local sect into a universal brotherhood. Christianity was emancipated from Judaism and became a worldwide religion. The author follows the church's growth throughout the empire from Jerusalem to Rome. He shows how the Christian faith embraced representatives of many nationalities and always remained as a united body.

It should be noted that the early church was a witnessing body. Acts is not so much concerned with the development of Christian life or its application of truth as it is with the work of preaching the gospel. it may be safe to suggest that the key verse of this book is Acts 1:8, "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." This witnessing of the early church was to be done in the power of the Holy Spirit. No other book in the Bible can teach us the power of the Spirit's divine office than in the book of Acts.

It should also be noted that the witness for Christ is the death, the resurrection, the present power, and the coming Kingdom of Christ. When Jesus declared that His disciples were to be His witnesses He meant that they were to be His instruments, His

mouthpieces, He will do the witnessing through them. In the first verse the author has referred the gospel as written "about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up to heaven." The implication of the author is that this second book would concern what Jesus continued to do. Acts is a record of the continuing activity of Christ, He is a mighty worker in all the scenes of this story, His message is being spoken, His power is being manifested, and His will is being done.

Contents

1. Acts 1:1-6:7 Luke begins by telling how the church grew in Jerusalem and ends with this phrase. "So, God's message spread. The disciples in Jerusalem continued to increase quickly in number. And very many priests obeyed the faith."
2. Acts 6:8-9:31 Here we learn how the gospel spread to Samaria. Stephen also becomes the first martyr by being stoned to death. This section ends with, "Meanwhile, the church all over Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a peaceful period. The Holy Spirit made the church strong and he encouraged the Christians. They respected the Lord and more people joined the church."
3. Acts 9:32-12:24 The author now tells us how Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus, a city in Syria. We also learn how the gospel reached Antioch the capital of Syria. Peter also accepts Cornelius into the church. Cornelius was a gentile. This part ends like this, "God's message continued to grow and it continued to spread."
4. Acts 12:25-16:5 Luke continues with how the gospel spread through more countries. It ends like this, "So, the Christians became stronger in the faith and more people joined the churches daily"
5. Acts 16:6-19:20 From here the gospel new about Jesus spreads to Europe. Here Paul starts a church in Corinth, Greece. Paul also starts a church in Ephesus. Ephesus was a very important city in a country now called Turkey. The section ends with these words, "In this manner, the Lord's message continued to increase in power and it spread widely."
6. Acts 19:21-28:31 In this final part Luke tells us that Paul has reached Rome. In Rome Paul is imprisoned. There, "he preached boldly about God's kingdom. He taught the facts about the Lord Jesus Christ and nobody tried to stop him."

When the Book of Acts was completed

The book ends with Paul in Rome. The Romans had arrested Paul and Luke does not say what happened to him next. Many students think that Luke completed this book soon after that. Luke also says nothing about the Emperor Nero. Nero killed many Christians in 64 AD. We do not know the exact date that Luke finished the book but it was somewhere around 62 AD.

Nero

Nero (Latin: Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus; 15 December 37 – 9 June 68) was Roman Emperor from 54 to 68, and the last in the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Nero was adopted by his great uncle Claudius to become his heir and successor, and succeeded to the throne in 54 following Claudius' death.

During his reign, Nero focused much of his attention on diplomacy, trade, and enhancing the cultural life of the Empire. He ordered theaters built and promoted athletic games. During his reign, the redoubtable general Corbulo conducted a successful war and negotiated peace with the Parthian Empire. His general Suetonius Paulinus crushed a revolt in Britain. Nero annexed the Bosporan Kingdom to the Empire and began the First Roman–Jewish War.

In 64, most of Rome was destroyed in the Great Fire of Rome, which many Romans believed Nero himself had started in order to clear land for his planned palatial complex, the Domus Aurea. In 68, the rebellion of Vindex in Gaul and later the acclamation of Galba in Hispania drove Nero from the throne. Facing assassination, he committed suicide on 9 June 68. His death ended the Julio-Claudian Dynasty, sparking a brief period of civil wars known as the Year of the Four Emperors. Nero's rule is often associated with tyranny and extravagance. He is known for many executions, including that of his mother, and the probable murder by poison of his stepbrother Britannicus.

He is infamously known as the Emperor who "fiddled while Rome burned" and as an early persecutor of Christians. He was known for having captured Christians to burn them in his garden at night for a source of light. This view is based on the writings of Tacitus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio, the main surviving sources for Nero's reign. Few surviving sources paint Nero in a favorable light. Some sources, though, including some mentioned above, portray him as an emperor who was popular with the common Roman people, especially in the East. Some modern historians question the reliability of ancient sources when reporting on Nero's tyrannical acts.

First persecutor

Non-Christian historian Tacitus describes Nero extensively torturing and executing Christians after the fire of 64. Suetonius also mentions Nero punishing Christians, though he does so as praise and does not connect it with the fire.

Christian writer Tertullian was the first to call Nero the first persecutor of Christians. He wrote, "Examine your records. There you will find that Nero was the first that persecuted this doctrine". Lactantius also said that Nero "first persecuted the servants of God", as does Sulpicius Severus. However, Suetonius writes that, "since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome" These expelled "Jews" may have been early Christians, although Suetonius is not explicit. Nor is the Bible

explicit, calling Aquila of Pontus and his wife, Priscilla, both expelled from Italy at the time, "Jews."

Killer of Peter and Paul

The first text to suggest that Nero killed an apostle is the apocryphal Ascension of Isaiah, a Christian writing from the 2nd century. It says, the slayer of his mother, who himself this king, will persecute the plant which the Twelve Apostles of the Beloved have planted. Of the Twelve one will be delivered into his hands.

Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea was the first to write that Paul was beheaded in Rome during the reign of Nero. He states that Nero's persecution led to Peter and Paul's deaths, but that Nero did not give any specific orders. Several other accounts have Paul surviving his two years in Rome and traveling to Hispania.

Peter is first said to have been crucified upside-down in Rome during Nero's reign in the apocryphal Acts of Peter. The account ends with Paul still alive and Nero abiding by God's command not to persecute any more Christians.

By the 4th century, a number of writers were stating that Nero killed Peter and Paul.

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Key Verses

Colossians 4:14, Philemon 1:24, John 10:16, Ephesians 3:6

Witness in Jerusalem

Chapter 1

Verses 1-11

The author begins by referring to his first work the Gospel of Luke, which was written for Theophilus. In Luke 1:3 Theophilus is referred to as "most excellent Theophilus" and Theophilus, which in Greek means beloved of God, was likely a mentor of Luke, and was possibly a medical doctor, as was Luke himself. Luke also addresses Theophilus as most excellent. Therefore, Theophilus might have been an important man that worked for the government.

In this introductory chapter to Acts the author quickly focuses its thought on the living, divine Lord, the Head of the Church, who by His Spirit is to unite His followers into one body, who is to empower this body for service and will direct it in all its work testifying of Him. The substance of the witness for Christ is in a brief compass of the works and words

of Christ, of His passion, of His resurrection, of His ascension, of the gift of the Spirit, of His second coming and His Kingdom. With our review of Acts we find that these truths to which testimony is being given continually by the witnessing church.

The most important statements of the theme are found in this opening paragraph. The ascension of Christ is mentioned in verses 2, 9, 11, the Great Commission in verses 6-8, and the promise of Christ's return in verses 10, 11.

The Preface

The ascension of Jesus Christ which was the culminating event of the Gospel of Luke is now the starting point of Acts. Luke reminded Theophilus that Christ had commanded the apostles to preach the gospel to all the nations. Now Acts is to speak of how this preaching was begun in Jerusalem and continued all the way to Rome. Luke reminds us that Jesus, who "He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days." The resurrection of Jesus Christ is to be the supreme message of the apostles in the scenes which follow. The resurrection of Christ is the best attested fact in history; it is the corner stone of the Christian faith. Jesus had during the forty days between His resurrection and ascension taught of things concerning the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom is to be established on the earth. Found here in this preface is the universal proclamation of the gospel which is the crowning statement. Here Luke repeats the promise of the baptism of the Spirit, by whose power the preaching is to be done. Jesus called it "the promise of the Father," because God had given it to the inspired prophets, including John the Baptist, and it was also the promise of Jesus Himself. This promised baptism contrasted with that of John the Baptists. John the Baptist baptized with water for the symbolism of cleansing of sin but the baptism of the Spirit was in relation to a Person whose continual presence was to transform character and to impart power for service. The disciples were to wait in Jerusalem for the fulfillment of this promise. When the gift of the Holy Spirit came the followers of Christ would be empowered for the work which Acts relates. This preface to the book of Acts brings an important message. All witnesses for Christ must not only declare His works and words, but must present Him as the risen and ascended Lord, and that such witness can be given only by those who are baptized in His Holy Spirit.

The Great Commission

Each of the four gospels describes the Great Commission in somewhat different accents. The substance of each is ever the same. The gospel of Matthew sounds with a note of kingly authority. (Matthew 28:18) the gospel of Mark emphasizes the accompanying divine power. (Mark 16:15-18) The gospel of Luke makes the universal witness prominent. (Luke 24:46-49) The gospel of John stresses the spiritual issue of the work. (John 20:21-23) Here in Acts the author relates the commission in connection with a question asked by the disciples of their risen Lord. "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring

the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus does not correct them as their belief was essentially true. Jesus does encourage them to expect restitution and that it would be much larger and more wonderful and more spiritual than they had dreamed. In Peter's second sermon, (Acts 3:21), calls it the restitution of all things. Complete blessedness was to come for Israel and the world but certain events must happen and certain conditions must be fulfilled. Chief among which, on the human side, was the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The return of Jesus and the perfected Kingdom of God is not to be known to the followers of Christ. "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority." First the Disciples of Christ must complete their work and for this they shall be empowered with the Holy Spirit. This power came upon them at Pentecost and has ever since been residing upon those who are completely surrendered to do the will of their Lord. The key task of those who follow Jesus and pray, "Thy kingdom come," is that of witnessing for Christ. "You shall be My witnesses," does not merely mean that Christ is the object or subject of our testimony, but that His witnesses belong to Him, and through His witnesses the living Lord is prosecuting the work by the power of His divine Spirit.

The work of the followers of Christ is to be universal. "In Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." In Jerusalem, city evangelization, and in all Judaea and Samaria, home missions, and even to the remotest part of the earth, foreign missions. This is the command given by the Lord Jesus Christ. how this was carried out is the story of Acts.

The Ascension of Christ

There are two realities to the ascension of Christ. Jesus passed from the sphere of the seen and temporal into the sphere of the unseen and eternal. There Jesus assumed "all authority in heaven and on earth."

Ever since the resurrection of Jesus, He had been meeting frequently with His disciples, eating and drinking with them, teaching them and "speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God." Jesus now formally withdraws from them, "a cloud received Him out of their sight." Now Jesus will be an unseen presence to them and speak to them through His Spirit. "He was lifted up," but we are not to suppose that He has passed to an infinite space, and now at some vast distance or some remote sphere. In this universe there is no up or down. To use the word ascended is a correct but merely a conventional use of speech. It fitly describes His disappearance from earthly sight and material conditions into the heavenly and spiritual.

This was the time, not at His resurrection, that the Lord received "the body of His glory." His resurrection was literal and real, the very same body that was laid in the tomb and came forth from the tomb. In His resurrected body were the nail prints and the mark of the spear, it was a body that could take food, which was made of "flesh and bones." (Luke

24:39, 42) Christ leaving the tomb, appearing behind closed doors in the upper room, disappearing suddenly at Emmaus, was miracles no more remarkable than His walking on the water and was preformed in the same body. When Jesus ascended the body of our Lord was transformed, was glorified, "flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God." The body of Jesus is now a glorified body which is, "seated on the right hand of God." The birth of Jesus had been miraculous and so too was His withdrawal into the region and order of the unseen. This transformation is an example and an assurance of the change which will be experienced by the believers when Christ returns. They will "be changed" from the mortal to immortal, and caught up "to meet the Lord in the air." (1 Corinthians 15:51-53 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

At the time of our Lord's ascension, a more important fact is, Jesus assumed universal power. Jesus can no longer be regarded as a mere human teacher, prophet, or martyr. Jesus has now entered the glory which He had with the Father "before the world was." Jesus again exists "in the form of God," as the creed states, "He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty." As Jesus declares in the Apocalypse, "I also overcame, and sat down with My Father in His throne." In this the reader is given a new hope and confidence. Such a picture forms a fitting introduction to the book of Acts, as it fixes the thought upon Christ, the Head of the Church. Our Lord now occupies the place of supreme power in the universe, and is so able to guide, control, and protect His witnesses in their work of worldwide testimony.

There are three things that encourage the Disciples of Christ to undertake their task. They have the assurance of the establishment of His Kingdom, the expected gift of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of His return. (Verses 10, 11) this encouragement came from the lips of the angels, "two men in white clothing stood beside them." Angels had heralded the birth of Christ, angels announced His resurrection; how natural they should predict His return! They came with a question, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky?" No time was to be spent in morning and regret, as there was work to be done. In the faithful accomplishment of their work they were to be inspired ever by this blessed hope, "This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven." The angels spoke of the future return of their Lord, when the triumph of His cause will be complete and an age of glory and righteousness will begin. The disciples returned to Jerusalem with "with great joy" (Luke 24:52) There is no greater promise that is more full of divine cheer, no promise has proved to be of greater stimulus to evangelistic and missionary enterprise. Acts tells us how the disciples went forth to preach the gospel in all the world, expecting and looking their Lord to return and to establish His Kingdom.

Verses 12-14

The disciples returned from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem, "a Sabbath day's journey away." This distance is not more than a thousand paces, no further than a pious Jew

would walk upon a Sabbath. The ascension of Jesus was virtually from Jerusalem, from within the sacred precincts, and the Holy City was to be from where the first witnessing for Christ was to start. The public ministry of Jesus started there in the Temple and His death, resurrection, and ascension took place there also. The disciples returned to Jerusalem wholly upon the command of their Lord, "not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father." They would have naturally fled from Jerusalem as it was a place of trouble, and their homes were in Galilee. There was a divine purpose in their witness beginning in Jerusalem. It may have been a place of danger, but it was also the place of the greatest opportunity. As the servants of Christ, we have all to ask, not where shall we be most at ease, but where shall we be most effective as witnesses for Christ. we should remember that very often the presence of adversaries makes the door great and effectual.

Comparing the list in Matthew 10:2-4 and Mark 3:16-19, we note that they are divided into the same three groups, "Peter, John, James, and Andrew, Phillip, Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James." James was called Thaddeus in the gospels and Bartholomew is to be identified with Nathanael.

Here Luke shows that in addition to the eleven Luke tells us that in the sacred circle in the upper room there were present certain women. Luke shows that the women were important. These women in the upper room had traveled from Galilee to Jerusalem with Jesus and His disciples. Mary the Mother of Jesus was also there and this is the last time she is mentioned in the New Testament. (Luke 8:2-3, Luke 23-55) Also this is the first time that Jesus' brothers were together with the disciples. Jesus' brother James became a leader in the church in Jerusalem. (Acts 12:17; Acts 15:13-21; Acts 21:18) All in all this group which had gather in the upper room were of humble position, they had modest means, and were moderate in ability, yet the united and empowered by the Spirit of Christ they formed the most important society and achieved the most notable work in the history of the world.

All the people in the room achieved one accord, a like mindedness in their faith. Jesus prayed in John 17 that we might be "one" (in Him). They were asking for the fulfillment of a promise; this always gives assurance in prayer. They had been promised by the Lord a new and mighty manifestation of His Spirit. We know that it was to come at Pentecost, and the opportunity it would give for witnessing to the crowds which would throng the sacred city. The disciples did not know the time appointed or the reasons for the delay. This is a key to our oneness in Christ. To those who honestly pray together will grow in their love, both for God and for each other. The result of prayer will strengthen every group of Believers to persevere in united intercession, trusting that the answer will be more blessed and abiding than the most confident dare ask or think.

Verses 15-20

Luke records that there were 120 people gathered in the upper room. There is a point to remember here. You may be the only Christian in your family, the only Christian in the place where you work, and there may only be a few Christians in your county, But God will use you to spread the good news.

Jesus had chosen twelve of his disciples to be Apostles. Twelve was an important number, as there were twelve tribes in Israel. Now with the loss of Judas there needed to be a replacement. It is hard to comprehend that Judas who walked with Jesus three years, to listen to Him, to see His miracles, and still turn away. More important is the question as to how Judas became an apostate and a traitor. A true look at his character and career is not that which makes him either a monster of iniquity or an innocent blunderer. His is the example of one who, in the light of close companionship with Christ, clings to an evil passion. Under these conditions one's character rapidly deteriorates. Judas' greed becomes his master, and when circumstances have so combined he is willing for a few pieces of silver, to betray the Lord. His fall is a practical warning for every follower of Christ. All the more reason that we should pray for one another, least one of us should fall. Peter made a reference to a Psalm that predicted that Jesus would be betrayed by a friend. (Psalm 41:9) All in the Room knew what Judas had done and all knew what had become of him. Luke probably heard this story when he came to Jerusalem in 57 AD and repeats it here. We can read the account in Luke 22:3-6; Luke 47-48. We can also read of Judas' death in Matthew 27:1-10. The details vary but the fact that Judas killed himself is undisputable. Actually the field was purchased for Judas from the 30-pieces of silver he flung back at the priests. Apparently, he hung himself, then stayed hung for awhile, after which his intestines burst out of his dead body. Reports of this disgusting, decomposing body reached the priests, who recognized who he was, and used the tainted, returned money for the burial. Both Judas and Peter turned away from the Lord; the difference was in what each of them did after that moment.

Peter spoke more and made reference to two verses from the scriptures, Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8 but he did not speak them. David's words in that Psalm had reference within his own immediate context but the true application was to be in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, for our sins. The Psalm includes other items in reference to the cross, such as "they gave Me gall for My food and for My thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." This did not pertain to David at all, as it was a direct prophecy about the suffering of our Lord. The other reference is Psalm 109:8, another psalm of David, where it is said, "let his (Judas') days be few" and "let another take his office." The "another" written here is actually neither of the men who were going to be put forward as candidates. Instead, God had someone else in mind - someone the apostles would not have chosen in 1000 years. Peter had said in verse 16 "the Holy Spirit said these things by means of David's mouth." David had written these words hundreds of years before. In his Gospel Luke tells

us that Jesus helped the disciples to understand the scriptures. Jesus taught these things after His resurrection. (Luke 24:25-27, 32, 45-49) the disciples learned that the Old Testament had many Prophecies about the Messiah. We also learn this from four other verses in the New Testament. (John 2:17; John 15:25; Romans 11:9-10)

Verses 21-26

The eleven remaining Apostles had been close to Jesus all three years of His ministry. Jesus had spent much time training them when they were away from the crowds that followed Him. They were there to help Jesus through His special work and ministry. They had also been with Him many times after His resurrection. They had also witnessed His ascension. They believed the one to replace Judas should be someone who had experienced Jesus as they had. This person must have also been one that had seen Jesus after His resurrection in order that this person would have a solid testimony.

One choice was Barsabbas whose name means “son of the Sabbath.” Barsabbas’ gentile name was Justus. Many Jews had both Hebrew names and Greek names. The other choice was Matthias. Eusebius lived from about 260 AD to 340 AD. He was a writer, who wrote history. Eusebius said that the 70 disciples in Luke 10:1 included Matthias and Barsabbas. It is hard to be sure about this as Luke does not mention them again.

They took the matter to prayer. In every decision in life we should always go to the Lord in prayer but we must not make the mistake of limiting the choices. God is all knowing and may have options that we do not know about. We should always be open to God’s plan and purpose and not rely on our own thinking. After praying they cast lots. When casting lots the names would be written on the stones. The stones would be placed into a jar and the jar shook until a stone would fall out. Whose ever name that was on the stone was the one they must choose.

They also assumed that the model of twelve apostles was the only one possible, because that was the number chosen for the earthly ministry of Jesus. They weren’t able to hold on to that number, for most of them would be eventually killed, starting with James and Paul would unexpectedly be added by the Lord. Then the word "apostle" took on new meaning, as it was selected in relation to others, such as Barnabas (Acts 14:14), James the Lord’s brother (Galatians 1:19), Silvanus and Timothy (1 Thessalonians 1:1, 1 Thessalonians 2:9), and Andronicus and Junia (Romans 16:7).

This was the last time in the New Testament that we read of the casting of lots. After the Holy Spirit came they would no longer need to do this to know the will of God. From then on the Holy Spirit would guide them.

Matthias was chosen and the early church reported that he went to Ethiopia, where he taught and subsequently was martyred. Matthias was apparently a good, decent, Christian man, selected for relative obscurity.

Key Verses

Luke 1:3, Matthew 28:18, Mark 16:15-18, Luke 24:46-49, John 20:21-23, Luke 24:39, 42, 1 Corinthians 15:51-53, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Luke 24:52, Luke 8:2-3, Psalm 41:9, Luke 23:55, Luke 22:3-6, Matthew 27:1-10, Psalm 109:8, Luke 24:25-27, 32, 45-49, John 2:17, John 15:25, Romans 11:9-10, Luke 10:1, Galatians 1:19, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 1 Thessalonians 2:9, Romans 16:7, Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:16-19,

Feast of Pentecost

Pentecost or Shavuot has many names in the Bible (the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Harvest, and the Latter First fruits). Celebrated on the fiftieth day after Passover, Shavuot is traditionally a joyous time of giving thanks and presenting offerings for the new grain of the summer wheat harvest in Israel. The name "Feast of Weeks" was given because God commanded the Jews in Leviticus 23:15-16, to count seven full weeks (or 49 days) beginning on the second day of Passover, and then present offerings of new grain to the Lord as a lasting ordinance.

Shavuot was originally a festival for expressing thankfulness to the Lord for the blessing of the harvest. And because it occurred at the conclusion of the Passover, it acquired the name "Latter First fruits." The celebration is also tied to the giving of the Ten Commandments and thus bears the name Matin Torah or "giving of the Law." Jews believe that it was exactly at this time that God gave the Torah to the people through Moses on Mount Sinai.

By: Mary Fairchild, About.com Guide

Shavuot will occur on the following days of the secular calendar:

- ❖ Jewish Year 5774: sunset June 3, 2014 - nightfall June 5, 2014
- ❖ Jewish Year 5775: sunset May 23, 2015 - nightfall May 25, 2015
- ❖ Jewish Year 5776: sunset June 11, 2016 - nightfall June 13, 2016
- ❖ Jewish Year 5777: sunset May 30, 2017 - nightfall June 1, 2017

Chapter 2

Verses 1-13

The Lord chose not a better day for the disciples to start their witness of Him. Pentecost was the most popular feast of the Jewish year and the whole city of Jerusalem was filled with people from every quarter of the globe. The name Pentecost implies that this feast fell on “the fiftieth day” after the Sabbath of Passover week. Pentecost is also called the “Day of First Fruits,” for it was a harvest festival, and its observance included the presenting to the Lord of two loaves made from the ripened wheat. This day would be a fitting time for the first new converts into the Church of Jesus Christ. Luke notes the arrival of Pentecost as a key event in salvation history. (Luke 9:51) Pentecost is closely connected to the Passover as the Holy Spirit’s coming would be associated with the saving events of the Lord’s crucifixion and exaltation.

The power of the Holy Spirit fell upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost. We are not to think that this is the first time the Holy Spirit appeared in the world. In all ages He had been imparting life guidance and strength and holiness to the people of God. Now the Holy Spirit was to work with a new instrument, namely the truth concerning the crucified, risen, ascended, divine Savior. The proclamation of this truth was the Church as the appointed agent. Pentecost then becomes the first chapter in the history of the church as it witnesses for Christ, and it embodies the impressive lesson that in all successful witnessing the power is that of the Spirit and the instrument is the message of the gospel.

This chapter opens with all the disciples gather, most likely in the upper room on a Sunday morning, with their hearts fixed upon Christ, waiting for the fulfillment of His promise. “Suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind.” In the Old Testament a loud sound often accompanied a theophany (Exodus 19:16,19 Exodus 20:18; compare Heb 12:19). A violent, rushing wind symbolizes the Holy Spirit (Ezekiel 37:9-14; compare Luke 16:16). There was no wind but this was a symbol of the Spirit, it indicated His power, mighty, mysterious, heavenly but unseen. “And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.” There was no fire but upon each believer there rested a luminous tongue, symbolic of the fervent, zealous witness each would be empowered to bear. “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.” They were brought completely under the control of the Spirit. This was for the disciples the essential experience of Pentecost. This event was repeated again and again in the days that followed. Other times of the Holy Spirit’s fillings of the believers is recorded in the following passages. (Acts 4:8, 31; Acts 9:17; Acts 13:9) This is an experience which is normal and natural for all the followers of Christ. The Holy Spirit never leaves a believer, but ever and again, as one is surrendered to the will of the Lord, he is absolutely, if unconsciously, dominated by His Spirit.

In this instance the disciples experienced a marvelous gift and they, "and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance." Their ability to speak in foreign languages not previously learned was merely a temporary endowment granted for a special purpose. It was one of those miraculous spiritual gifts which marked the age of the apostles. In modern times the claim to possess this power has never been established with credible evidence. We should not test the dominance of the Spirit in believers by if they have or do not have the presence of a special spiritual gift. A believers obedience to their Master grants them the ability to do the will of the Master, not necessarily in spectacular service but surly in holy living, for the "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-23)

The gift of tongues was what the disciple needed to speak to such a larger gathering of people of different languages. For, "Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven." The miracles of the Bible were not mere prodigies which caused wonder, they had a practical purpose. This gift to the disciples at Pentecost made it possible for the gospel story to be given on a single day to hearers from many different nations.

What is repeatable of this Pentecost experience of the Holy Spirits work on the day and what is not? On this first appearance of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost the purposes were served for that day and that time in the beginning History of the church. We shall probably not see them again. The external signs of sound and sight and the foreign languages fall into this category. But in the present age and the ages to come we should see the church filled with the Holy Spirit, powerfully enabled to bear witness to Christ and his gospel.

Paul gives us further insight in the gift called 'tongues' in 1 Corinthians chapters 12 and 14. Many Christians believe that the Holy Spirit still gives this gift to Christians today. With it, people can speak in special languages. These are languages that they have not learned. These languages may be human languages or angels' languages (1 Corinthians 13:1). This gift is for prayer and it is for prophecy. Usually, when people speak in 'tongues', they cannot understand that language. They cannot understand what they are saying. But sometimes the Holy Spirit tells another person what the translation is. i rest upon my belief that if a gift does not glorify God then it probably is not from God.

If we have not experienced the Holy Spirit's work within our church body we should ask ourselves why? Have we met the challenge of Pentecost with expectant prayer and cleansed lives? God has not abandoned his church. If he sent his Spirit before, he can do it again.

The sound of the blowing of a violent wind was not confined just to the upper room as it attracts a crowd. A curious crowd composed of devout Hellenistic Jews from every nation

under heaven. (Deuteronomy 2:25) The crowd of mixed nations and languages are amazed that they can understand the words of Galileans in their own language. People from Galilee spoke in a dialect of their own. People from other places could not always understand them. But now, these disciples from Galilee were speaking in different languages. Now the disciples were speaking in a language everyone could understand.

Jews lived in other countries other than in Judea. For more than 500 years earlier the enemies of Israel had taken or driven them to other lands. This list shows that many Jews from many different nations were in Jerusalem. They all heard about the wonderful things that God had done on this special Pentecost day. They would carry this good news back to their countries and they would tell other people. Through them the gospel message was spreading throughout the world.

People in the crowd were from many nationalities and places of origin. They begin with the far eastern border of the Roman Empire (Parthians, Medes and Elamites), move westward through Mesopotamia and Judea (Israel, understood according to its God-given boundaries--Joshua 1:4), and then encompass regions of Asia Minor in a circular counterclockwise fashion, commencing with the east: Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia. The list then notes southern regions of the empire--Egypt and, west of it, the parts of Libya near Cyrene. Rounding out the list is Rome, the Empire's center, and two geographical extremities: the islands of the sea, represented by Cretans, and the desert places, represented by Arabs (Ezekiel 30:5)

Miracles do arouse surprise and interest, as they are also designed for this, and the gift of tongues which the disciples received at once drew a great multitude and fixed their attention upon the message. "We hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God."

Miracles are a sign of divine power and symbols of abiding truths. This ability of the disciples to speak in the languages of the people convinced many of the reality of the gospel message as the disciple declared "the mighty deeds of God." To others the utterances seemed as the babbling of men. The story of Christ's cross is often regarded as "foolishness" by the reputed wise men of the world.

The crowd is marveled and astonished and progresses to perplexity. They are trying to figure out the "why" of this miracle, both its cause and its significance. Some admit their inability to come up with an answer but show they are open for one as they wonder aloud, "What does this mean?" Others, for whom much of the speech is gibberish, mock, accusing the believers of being drunk with sweet wine. (Luke 7:34)

The disciples too must have been marveled that they were empowered to witness to so many men of different nationalities. This must have brought a remembrance of the promised presence and power of the Master and His assurance that they would be His

witnesses “unto the uttermost part of the earth.” To the church of today this story of Pentecostal gift should bring a like assurance of needed grace for those who undertake to carry the gospel of Christ to all the peoples of the world.

Verses 14-41

From the time of birth and as a toddler to the height of our intellectual ability we are always and naturally asking the big question of “why.” Are asking of this question comes from two directions. First we want to know the cause and second we want to know the effect it will have upon us.

In regards to our own personal destiny, where do we go from here after life in this world, is to discover the best good news for our future, is to have a good solid argument for the cause and significance of Pentecost.

Referring back to verse 2: 4 "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance," In the power of the Holy Spirit Peter begins his formal address. Peter addresses them in a formal tone as “Men of Judea,” which will soften as he proceeds "Men of Israel," and finally as "Brethren." Peter’s message explains the Pentecostal events as God’s saving acts and shows its crucial importance for his hearers and for us. (See Acts 4:12; Acts 13:38: Acts 28:28)

Using a little humor Peter dismisses the explanation that they had too much wine. The culture of the day was that the first meal was not taken till ten o’clock and it was only nine o’clock in the morning. Nine o’clock in the morning would be way too early to find one drunk on too much wine.

The ultimate cause and significance of the Spirit's empowerment is found in God and his saving purposes, as the prophet Joel foretold. (Joel 2:28) Peter explains that this is what is happening before their eyes and it is the outpouring of God’s spirit that they are hearing. This is in contrast In contrast to the selective and occasional outpouring of the Spirit on king and prophet in the Old Testament time of promise (1 Samuel 10:10 1 Samuel 16:14; Ezekiel 11:5), here the Spirit comes without regard to age, sex, social status or, as Acts 2:39 indicates, ethnic origin.

The spirit empowers people to prophesize. For Luke prophecy encompasses Spirit-filled speaking in other languages (Acts 2:12, 16), predictive discourse (Acts 11:27; Acts 21:10; compare Acts 9:10; Acts 10:10; Acts 16:9; Acts 18:9, where dreams and visions guide the post-Pentecost church) and proclamatory witness. (Acts 15:32) the Old Testament prophets made God’s will known by their witnessing to His word. Today all Christians are Spirit filled to bear witness to "knowledge of God through Christ which the Holy Spirit kindles and makes to burn through the word of the gospel." (Compare Acts 1:8)

Both Joel and Peter remind us of the decisiveness of these last days by pointing to cosmic signs on earth and in heaven. The sinful nature of humankind has made a shamble of and has been an assault on God's moral order. Because of this the human race must know that judgment must come on the day of the Lord. (Isaiah 13:6, 9 Ezekiel 30:3 Zephaniah 1:14-15) The hope held onto by Joel is that anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Acts 2:21 Joel 2:32 Romans 10:13).

As we look about us today in a world of rapid social change, moral decay, environmental crisis and seemingly unmanageable economic and political problems, we can identify with the apostle's and prophet's sense of the end. Our comfort is that our God is in control and we can see His work all about us. We live in a time of the Spirit's life giving presence. This is the challenge for us, will we call upon the name of the Lord and be saved? Apostolic Gospel at Pentecost: The Immediate Cause (Acts 2:22-36)

Who is the Lord and how do we know that He can save? What does Pentecost have to do with our salvation? Peter directs the crowd's attention to Jesus of Nazareth. Peter points the crowd's attention to Jesus. Through Jesus they had heard of or witnessed God's divine power. Through Jesus God worked His miracles. In Jesus they could see the power of God's presence, His signs miraculous embodiments of spiritual truth.

Peter now boldly implicates the crowds in the death of Jesus. This was done with the help of wicked men, Roman Gentiles who crucified Him. The responsibility was in tension with the plan and foreknowledge of God. (Compare Luke 22:22) The sacrificial death of Jesus was very much a part of God's set purpose and foreknowledge. (See Acts 3:18; 13:29) Peter does not explicitly refer to Jesus' death as a vicarious atonement; he gives us the objective fact, which is the basis for such an understanding: an innocent man suffered and died.

Jesus may have been killed by Human beings, but God had resurrected Him from the dead. In a remarkable mixed metaphor, death's agony became its birth pangs: death was in labor and unable to hold back the "delivery" of Jesus.

Peter, with respect to Pentecost, the resurrection of Jesus is the answer to the question "why" from both angles. It is the immediate cause of Pentecost, (Verses 32-33) and it is the ground for the saving significance of the Pentecost event.

Based on Scripture, Peter now argues that Jesus' resurrection is part of God's saving plan. In verses 25-28 he introduces a quote from Psalm 16:8-11 to explain Jesus' resurrection as the fulfillment of prophecy about the Messiah. The psalmist declares that because of his ongoing relationship with the Lord God, he will not be shaken. These accords well with Luke's portrayal of Jesus in his last hours (Luke 23:46 Psalm 31:5 Mark 15:34 Psalms 22:1). The psalmist expresses joyful confidence that his flesh will live in

hope. He openly declares that there is no abandonment to Sheol or experience of decay, but rather the path of life and the joy of God's presence forever.

How is it possible to understand a first-person psalm attributed to David, in which he appears to speak of his protection from death, as a prophecy of the Messiah's hope in a resurrection out of death? Peter comes to such an understanding by using two principles: literal interpretation and a messianic reading of first-person Davidic psalms. Thus David, "not . . . as a mere person but David as the recipient and conveyor of God's ancient but ever-renewed promise," can predict the Messiah's experience. Pointing to the well-known tomb of David, Peter contends that David could not be talking about himself. By a process of elimination, then, someone else must qualify to experience the literal fulfillment of this promise. That someone is the Messiah. For David was a prophet. He had received the divinely sworn promise of an eternal reign for one of his descendants, who would be the Messiah (2 Samuel 7:12-13; Psalm 132:12).

But how can a Messiah who suffers and dies also reign forever (Psalms 22:15-16)? It is possible only if that Messiah rises from the dead. David was permitted to see ahead of time this vital stage in God's process of redemption. So he could speak confidently of Messiah's resurrection when he said that Messiah was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay (Acts 2:31). What a wise God to plan a path the Messiah would follow to effect salvation! What a merciful God to reveal a portion of that path to prophets, so that now, as we look back after the fulfillment, it all makes sense (see 1 Peter 1:10-12).

Now Peter moves from argumentation to proclamation (Acts 2:32). The great good news is that God has now raised to life the same Jesus who was crucified (v. 23). Peter adds his voice and those of the other apostles to the witness of the Scriptures. So confident is he of the apostolic witnesses' compelling testimony that he can divide his presentation into two steps: (1) the Old Testament bears witness to a risen Messiah and (2) we bear witness to Jesus as the risen Messiah.

Peter unveils an even greater truth about Jesus which turns his audience into witnesses of God's saving grace. Jesus is the exalted Lord raised to the Father's right hand in heaven (see also v. 30). From that position of authority Jesus mediates the gift of the Spirit (John 14:16, 26 John 16:7).

Peter has preached Scripture proof of Jesus as the Messiah risen from the dead (vv. 25-28), given an interpretation (vv. 29-31) and made a proclamation (v. 32). Now he proclaims Jesus as the exalted Lord and giver of the Spirit (v. 33), gives an interpretation (v. 34) and presents Scripture proof (vv. 34-35 Psalm 110:1). This construction binds together Jesus' resurrection, his exaltation and his giving of the Spirit.

Again by a process of elimination and literal interpretation, Peter applies the Old Testament text to the Messiah. David is dead; we cannot claim that he has ascended to heaven. Then, following the lead of Jesus, Peter claims that David is addressing the Messiah when he says, "The Lord [God] said to my Lord [the Messiah]" (Luke 20:41-44 Psalm 110:1). When Jesus asked how David could call his descendant "Lord," he was not simply making Messiah and Lord synonymous titles. When the One who is literally exalted to the right hand of the Father is called "Lord," he is addressed as more than an honored human descendant of David. The way Jesus formulated the question implied as much. Peter, unveiling what Jesus' question hinted at, declares him to be Lord in the sense of Yahweh. Jesus is God! (See also Acts 2:21, 36, 38.)

Peter calls his listeners to know for certain that God has openly avowed Jesus to be Lord and Messiah (compare Luke 1:4). Jesus may now rightfully be declared Messiah, since he has done Messiah's saving work and has been vindicated by God, who raised him from the dead. He may properly be proclaimed Lord in the highest sense of the word, as the respectful designation of the unpronounceable name of God (Yahweh). For by his resurrection-exaltation he has demonstrated that he is the ever-living and life-giving God, whom death cannot hold and who pours out the Spirit (Acts 2:24, 33).

Peter immediately reminds his listeners that it is this risen and exalted Messiah and Lord whom they have crucified. "They were not trifling with a Galilean carpenter, but God!" Application of Pentecost: A Call to Repentance and Promise (2:37-41)

By the Spirit (John 16:8-11) the crowd feels the sharp pain of guilt. For Luke, this is as it should be: the heart, the inner life, is the source of all the thoughts, motivations, intentions and plans of sinful human beings (Luke 6:45 Luke 12:34 Luke 21:34; Acts 5:3-4 Acts 7:39 Acts 8:21-22 Acts 28:27). Realizing they have killed the Messiah, their only hope of salvation, they desperately want to know, "Is there anything we can do about this? Or are we doomed to suffer God's certain wrath on the day of the Lord?". They address Peter and the rest of the apostles, for it is the apostolic gospel, not a gospel of Peter that they must receive and cling to (Acts 2:32, 42).

What does it take to bring people to their knees before an Almighty God? People must get beyond their anxiety, the awareness that something is wrong, to facing their guilt, recognition that something is wrong. The very sins of people today put Jesus to death on the Roman Cross just as surely as the hatred of the first century people. With this fact there is no room for anti-Semitism. Peter must return to the scene of the crime, the cross, with his first audience. We must face up to our guilt before almighty God, the Judge. We must throw ourselves on his mercy, asking, what shall we do? (v. 37)

The invitation of Peter is to repent, do an about face in the orientation of your life and attach yourself to Jesus. People must turn from their rebellion from God and turn to Christ,

a necessary condition for receiving salvation blessings. (Luke 13:3, 5 Luke 15:7 Luke 16:30 Luke 24:47 Acts 3:19 Acts 17:30 Acts 20:21 Acts 26:20) What about faith? It is mentioned in verse 44. John Stott observes, "Repentance and faith involve each other, the turn from sin being impossible without the turn to God, and vice versa"

Peter calls for each one to be individually baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. By repentance and baptism we show that we have met the conditions for the reception of the salvation blessings, Luke does not imply that salvation comes by merit or ritual. Luke consistently presents both forgiveness and the Spirit as gifts of grace. (Acts 3:19 Acts 5:31 Acts 11:38 Acts 11:17 Acts 15:8) The gift of the Holy Spirit is the One, who regenerates, indwells, unites, and transforms lives. All the fruit and gifts of the Holy Spirit flow from this one great gift.

Peter now states the universal extent of the salvation offer. The offer extends across time and space, generations and cultures, your children and those who are far off. (See Isaiah 57:19 Ephesians 2:13) As Peter tells the audience their responsibility he does not let them forget that salvation is the work of God from beginning to end. Those who respond are answering the Lord our God's effective call on their lives. (Compare Acts 13:48 Acts 16:14)

The Prophet Joel promised salvation (Joel 2:32 Acts 2:21 and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved) and is now accomplished by Jesus. (Acts 2:36 God has made this Jesus Lord) Salvation is humanly appropriated when one is baptized in the name of Jesus Christ with the assurance that the gift of salvation is for all whom the Lord our God will call. (Verses 38-39)

Along with the many other things Peter said to the crowd he kept on exhorting them to allow themselves to be saved, rescued from a corrupt generation. The Israelites who wandered in the wilderness were labeled in the Old Testament as a "crooked generation". (Deuteronomy 32:5 Psalms 78:8) Peter uses this phrase to intensify the call to repentance. The judgment of God was felt by the wilderness generation when they did not repent. If the present generation does not answer the call to repentance they too will experience God's judgment. The gospel call comes clearly and urgently today. "The question is not, shall I repent? For that is beyond a doubt. But the question is, shall I repent now, when it may save me; or shall I put it off to the eternal world when my repentance will be my punishment?" Three thousand souls welcomed the word (compare Acts 28:30), met its conditions and were baptized. They joined the ranks of the apostles and disciples in the nucleus of the New Testament church.

With 3000 believers on this first day and more being added every day the disciples busied themselves with teaching. The church must always be a place of learning, helping believers to grow and mature in their faith in Jesus. The Holy Spirit has been given to help

believers to understand the scriptures and to guide us in our walk. But Christians must also help each other. (1 Thessalonians 5:11) They often gathered at the Temple to worship and learn together. It is important for Christians to have a close fellowship with one another in order to help each other as they travel to the promised Kingdom. (Hebrews 10:25)

They also broke bread together. The Jews of the day did not cut their bread but broke it up and then shared it with one another. Jesus on the night of the Last Supper broke bread with His disciples. He broke up the bread and he gave it to them. He said, "Take this and eat it. This is my body." Then he gave to them a cup of wine. He said, "This is my blood in the New Covenant. It is poured out for many people." So, to break up bread has a special meaning for Christians.

"Everyone felt both excitement and fear." In the Old Testament, writers often used the words "the fear of the Lord". This does not mean that people were afraid of God. "The fear of the Lord" meant that people respected God. They respected him because he is good, powerful and holy.

"They sold the things that belonged to them." These things were land and possessions. The Christians showed that they were taking care of each other. So, no Christian was rich and no *Christian was poor. Each person had what he or she needed. The first Christians were kind and generous. They were happy and they showed God's love in their daily lives. People wanted to come to be with them.

Key Verses

Leviticus 23:15-16, Galatians 5:22-23, Luke 9:51, Exodus 19:16,19, Exodus 20:18, Heb 12:19, Ezekiel 37:9-14, Luke 16:16, 1 Corinthians 13:1, Joshua 1:4, Ezekiel 30:5, Luke 7:34, 1 Samuel 10:10, 1 Samuel 16:14, Ezekiel 11:5, Isaiah 13:6, 9, Ezekiel 30:3, Zephaniah 1:14-15, Joel 2:32, Romans 10:13, Luke 22:22, Luke 23:46, Psalm 31:5, Mark 15:34, Psalms 22:1, 2 Samuel 7:12-13, Psalms 132:12, Psalms 22:15-16, 1 Peter 1:10-12, John 14:16, 26, John 16:7, Psalms 110:1, Luke 20:41-44, Luke 1:4, John 16:8-11, Luke 6:45, Luke 12:34, Luke 21:34, Luke 13:3, 5, Luke 15:7, Luke 16:30, Luke 24:47, Isaiah 57:19, Ephesians 2:13, Deuteronomy 32:5, Psalms 78:8, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Hebrews 10:25

Chapter 3

Verses 1-10

Since the day of Pentecost there are possibly many miracles that have not been recorded in the scriptures, as this was true of the many miracles of Jesus, we know of only a few.

The apostles Peter and John are together going to the Temple to pray. As we learned in the gospels they were in the inner circle with Jesus and it is all expected that they would remain close in their leadership of the church. Like all fellow Christians they have remained loyal to their Jewish ceremonies and forms of worship and it is the time for prayer, the ninth hour of the day. It would be good for all Christians to have a fixed time and place for prayer each day.

At the Beautiful Gate leading to the Temple Peter and John encounter a lame beggar and thought this miracle no more marvelous than any other that the Apostles were doing in the power of the Lord, it is significant because it brought notice from the Jewish leaders and resulted in the first serious opposition to the Christian Church. The Gate they are passing through to the Temple is called the Beautiful Gate. The gate is named such because of its superb doors of Corinthian bronze. A beggar who has been lame from his birth catches their attention. A lame beggar who is carried to the Temple gate each day so that he might have the opportunity to "beg alms of those who were entering the Temple." Peter raises the hope of the beggar when he replies "Look at us!"

The beggar is then taken back when he hears the words "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene--walk!" Peter did not give the man mere worldly silver and gold but something of far greater value. Peter offered the man healing in the name and power of Jesus Christ. The lame man took faith in the words that Peter spoke. Then Peter "seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up," not to strengthen his feet but to strengthen his faith.

"With a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God ... and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him." It was a noticeable cure as the man was well known, there were countless witnesses that knew him, he had been lame for many years and in an instant of time he was given perfect soundness by putting his trust in the living Christ.

Humanity may be pictured as lying outside the Temple of true life, of real service, of actual worship. Weak, helpless, and hopeless mankind is in need of the transforming power which comes to those who put their trust in Christ. Man does not live on the bread that feeds the flesh alone but on the spiritual truth found in God's Word. (Matthew 4:4) The duty of the church is to stretch out the right hand of loving ministry, to teach the gospel message, to offer relief and to express sympathy, and to do so, "In the name of Jesus Christ." The church is to inspire faith in Him who alone can heal and save.

Verses 11-26

Many had gathered around and marveled at this miracle of the healing of the lame man. This provided Peter with an audience, and also the proof of the truth he wished to

establish. On the Day of Pentecost the gift of tongues had been given to the apostles and the people had marveled at that event, as it established the fact that Jesus was "Lord and Christ." Now a lame man from birth was healed in the name of Jesus Christ, "all the people ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement." It is here, as the crowd gathered in the great portico of Solomon at the Temple, that Peter delivered his second recorded sermon.

The Theme Verses 12-18

The theme is the same as at Pentecost, the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Servant of God, and the divine Savior. The miracle of Pentecost and that of the lame man gave Peter an introduction to his theme and also a supreme demonstration. Speaking of the lame man who had been healed, Peter states that the power was in no way of his own but by faith in Jesus. It was by faith that the lame man was given perfect soundness. It was faith in Jesus who they had "delivered up" and "killed," but such a miracle of healing, not by the wisdom of any man, is certain proof that Jesus had risen from the dead, and through these wondrous acts was manifesting His divine presence and power.

In Peter's witness for His divine Lord, Peter also set forth the incomparable crime of those by whom He had been rejected and crucified. The charge is mad striking by Peter's verbal contrasts. By rejecting Jesus as the Messiah they had also rejected the God of their fathers who they professed to serve. They had delivered to death One whom even the pagan Pilate would have released. They had forsaken the "Holy and Righteous One Hand asked for a murderer." They had chosen a destroyer of life in place of "the Prince of life." Though they had Jesus killed God rose Him up from the grave. Jesus, whom they regarded as a malefactor, had Himself preformed the miracles which now they are in marvel. The miracle of the healing of the lame beggar was a vindication of Jesus, but it was a conviction to those who had refused to accept Him.

Peter offers no excuse for his listeners but does offer them the hope of pardon. Their sinful acts were committed in ignorance, but might be pardoned should they now repent in the light of this testimony concerning Jesus Christ. The death of Jesus, which they had secured, was part of God's plan for their salvation of which all the prophets had spoken. This did not mitigate their crime, but it declared to them the divine provision for the forgiveness of sin.

A Call to Repentance Verses 19-21

Peter call for repentance, it is brief and serious, yet he offers not threatening remarks, but bases his appeal upon gracious promises. They are pointed to blessings both individual and universal, both for the now and for the distant future. If the people would be sincere, repent from their unbelief and turn from their evil ways, their sins would be "wiped away," and more marvelous still, Jesus Christ would come back again from heaven and the whole world would experience the glad "times of refreshing" of which all the poets and prophets

have sung. By the first coming of Christ forgiveness of sins was made possible, by His sufferings and death, but the universal blessings are conditioned upon His second coming. All believers are longing for that day, such messages as this of Peter's lead men to repentance.

[An Appeal to Scripture Verses 22-26](#)

Peter closes his sermon basing its warnings and its promises upon the words of Moses and the prophets. Moses the great lawgiver had predicted the coming of Christ and had declared the doom of those who refuse to accept Him: "And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people." Peter also notes the Prophet Samuel's prophecy concerning the Christ "And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days." Samuel foretold of the present days of grace. The Prophets had spoken of the atoning work of Christ, of His coming glory; the promises of blessing were for "all the families of the earth shall be blessed," but the offer of salvation had come to Israel first, it was to them the Christ had been sent to bless them in turning everyone from sin. To us the same Savior is being presented today, and His appointed messengers declare his pardoning grace, the peril of rejecting Him, and the possibility of sharing the blessedness of His perfected Kingdom.

Key Verses

Matthew 4:4

Chapter 4

[Verses 1-22](#)

[The Arrest of the Apostles Verses 1-4](#)

Peter and John were not so much arrested for the miracle as it was for the claims they had made and the proof they had presented. Peter's sermon had aroused the antagonism of the rulers and resulted in the first opposition to the Christian Church. These rulers were quick to act. While the apostles were still speaking to the crowd which had been attracted by the miracle they were arrested. "The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them, being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day." The Temple captain and those of high priestly decent who were in charge of the precincts, may have feared a tumult when they saw the excitement aroused by the man who had been healed. The real source of the opposition is revealed by the mention of the "Sadducees." The Sadducees were the most aristocratic, wealthy, and powerful party in Jerusalem, and also the least orthodox. They

were the real instigators of the movement. The Sadducees were materialists and denied the doctrines of a future life and of the immortality of the soul, they were troubled because the apostles taught the people, and proclaimed in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. It must have disturbed the Sadducees that the man whom they had crucified had risen and was again to appear. This movement of the Christian faith was also a cause of jealousy, as this might lessen their power and endanger the rich revenues they reaped from the Temple worship. Their action, however, was cautious and guarded. The Sadducees only secured the arrest of the apostles and placed them in confinement, only to be detained till the next day, as the hour was too late for a public trial.

Two thoughts occur in this exchange, skeptics like the Sadducees have always been the bitterest enemies of Christ, and further attacks on the church became more bitter only as its members were better prepared to endure the trial. It has always been the case that the church thrives under persecution. The significance of this truth comes in the statement that Peter and John were arrested, and that "many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand."

[The Arraignment of Peter and John Verses 5-7](#)

The "rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem," that is, there was a session of the Sanhedrin, the highest court in the nation. Annas, who had been disposed by the Romans but was still regarded as a High Priest by the Jews, was there as well as Caiaphas, his son in law, who had been appointed as his successor, and John and Alexander, whose names add to the dignity and power and representative character of the council.

The official question addressed to the disciples was intended to be a snare to draw an answer which might be construed as blasphemy. "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?" the ploy of the Sanhedrin was for the apostles to claim the miracle was of divine power other than God. This challenge was accepted by the apostles and they declared that the divine power came from their Savior and Lord Jesus Christ.

[The Answer of the Apostles Verses 8-12](#)

Peter gave a courteous reply, but we cannot fail to notice the sarcasm of his opening sentence: "Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead--by this name this man stands here before you in good health." At once Peter has placed a ridiculous light on his enemies who in cowardice and treachery have asked an explanation of the miracle. Peter goes on to answer the question in a rejoicing manner that his judges cannot deny the reality of the miracle or displace it from the testimony that he is ready to give. Peter boldly declares that the man had been healed in the name of Jesus Christ, whom these rulers had killed, whom in striking

contrast "God raised from the dead." The rulers had treated Jesus with contempt, but God had raised Him to the place of supreme honor, "stone which was rejected," but now "became the chief corner stone." "For there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." Peter not only asserts that the miracle was in the name of Jesus, but that he and his judges can in no other name have eternal salvation. Peter's words are a rebuke, a challenge, and an invitation. There are today benevolent and superficial talkers who need to review the testimony of Peter which is in opposition that Christianity is only one among many religions, and that it is only necessary for one to be sincere in his own belief. Such false teachers need to reconcile their statements with those of Peter and John who were "filled with the Holy Spirit" when they declared that there is but one name wherein we must be saved.

[The Threat of the Rulers and the Calm Defiance of the Apostles Verses 13-22](#)

This trial only emphasized the courage of Peter and John but also mark a crisis in the history of the church. There are two reasons that the boldness of the apostles astonished the members of the council. First, they were "uneducated and untrained men," but this does not mean they were illiterate, but that they had not received the technical training of the Jewish schools and therefore might not have dared to dispute with the skilled lawyers who composed the court. Secondly, "they began to recognize them as having been with Jesus." This could mean that the knowledge explained the conduct of the apostles, on the other hand, it really added to the perplexity of the rulers. The apostles had "been with Jesus." They knew Him, they could not have been mistaken easily as to His identity, yet they declared Him to be alive, and in spite of their humble rank they insisted, even more to the Sanhedrin, that Jesus was living and those miracles were being done in His name.

In conference the rulers could not deny the miracle, as the man who had been healed was standing in their midst, but they could forbid the disciples "not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus." The Sanhedrin had commanded the apostles with the threat of punishment. They received and surprising replay from the apostles, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." These words of Peter and John virtually declared the church to be independent of the Jewish State, and they repudiated the rulers as being opposed to God on whose side the apostles claimed to be. The determination to boldly witness for Jesus Christ by Peter and John was the first great step in the development of the church from the Jewish sect into a universal brotherhood. Their courage here is not to be taken lightly. Separating from associations one has held sacred and to oppose authorities whom one has regarded supreme, requires a tremendous amount of courage. There is only one stand that a

Christian can make, that is the one he believes to be right in the sight of God. Such a choice always results in larger liberties and increased power.

Verses 23-31

Peter and John released from the Jewish rulers hurried back to their fellow Christians and reported everything they had experienced. Together they all had a praise and prayer meeting. They rejoiced in the deliverance of the apostles and the bold witness they had given before the rulers. But they also knew that the situation now had become serious. Their commission was to witness for Christ and now the supreme rulers had forbidden all testimony in the name of Jesus. They all turned to the unfailing source for comfort the scriptures, which has been a source of consolation for Christians throughout the ages. They found the needed message in the second Psalm. (Psalms 2:2-3) The psalmist speaks of kings and rulers, Gentiles and peoples of Israel, who had set themselves against the anointed, the parallel is perfect for this time they were experiencing. It is as a prophecy about King Herod and Pilate the ruler of the unbelieving Gentiles and the people of Israel who had set themselves against Jesus, the anointed Christ. In John 15:18-19 Jesus had warned the apostles that this would happen. "If the world hate you, you know that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love his own: but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." This identified the apostles with their Lord, as now they were facing the same hostility. There is a further implication in the Psalm, "He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them." (Psalms 2:4) as the disciples cry out in their time of need it is to the One who can deliver. It was not from their deliverance from the trial they were praying for but for boldness in their witness for Jesus and for miracles to accompany and to attest to their message. Today's church should not expect freedom from opposition. But in all trials the church should display courage should be shown and wonders can be seen by those who look to God for help to accomplish their allotted task.

Our Lord is faithful and an answer is sure to come as it did for the disciples of old. "And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness." Some have called this a second Pentecost, and indeed it was. There was no sound of wind or tongues of fire but the ground trembled as a sign of His divine presence and power. Instead of being able to speak in a foreign language they were given courage to testify for Christ before their countrymen. Christians of today need to be filled with the Holy Spirit again and again. The condition is to surrender to Christ and whole hearted commitment to do His will in spite of peril and opposition and hatred. This will result in new power and courage in service, and not infrequently it will come when believers are gathered in some "Upper Room" where they have met to read the scriptures, to sing, and to unite their hearts in prayer.

Verses 32 -37

It might seem here that the Christian membership had a common purse. From this narrative some had argued for "communism" as being truly Christian and apostolic.

Reading this narrative more closely shows that the community of Goods here described was purely local, temporary, occasional, and voluntary. Only in Jerusalem was this practiced, and not in other cities in the empire, and there only for a short time. Not even in all of Jerusalem was it observed by the Christians in the since that all possessions were sold and placed in a common fund. Mary, the mother of Mark, whose nephew was Barnabas contributed in special generosity by selling a field that he owned and offering the proceeds to the church. The facts support that many Christians did contribute to the treasury of the church, others sold their possessions from time to time as special needs arose. Others placed their property as a sacred trust. This whole matter of giving was rather one of sentiment, of spirit, of charity, than of definite requirement and inflexible rule. These believers were of one heart and soul and that is the important point. When the need arose they were willing to sell their possessions to meet that need. What is truly significant, remarkable, admirable, is the love which prompted these believers, so that "and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own." This kind of love is the gift of the Spirit, as is suggested by the connection in which this community of goods is mentioned, and is possessed by those who have yielded themselves wholly to Christ.

Key Verses

Psalms 2:2-3 Psalms 2:4 John 15:18-19

Chapter 5

Verses 1-11

Ananias and Sapphira found in the community of goods a temptation to commit sin for their own gain. Peter had told Ananias that he had been under no compulsion to sell his plot of land, and that when it was sold he had been free to retain the money. Their sin which appeared first in the early church was grievous and brought the severest punishment. Yet is not an unfamiliar sin today as to lose its lesson of warning for even the professed followers of Christ. Ananias acted out a lie and his wife spoke a lie. Ananias sold a piece a property and brought a part of the price to Peter, for the church treasury, pretending that he had brought all the money that he had received. When Sapphira appeared Peter asked her if Ananias had given all that he had received for the property. Sapphira falsely said that he had.

It would serve us well to pause here and look at the various ins that are involved here and what the scriptures say in regard to them In both the Old and New testament. The sins of Ananias and Sapphira are painfully common and are various kinds of deception and pretense and affectation and falsehood. Ananias was not only a liar he was a thief.

(Exodus 20:15) Peter had said this when he accused him of kept back dishonestly, or fraudulently concealed part of the price. He was guilty also of impiety and sacrilege. He not only lied to men but also he had lied to God, and actually he had endeavored to rob God, as he had tried to deceive the church which the Holy Spirit was controlling. Ananias kept back what he had professed to have devoted to a sacred use. (Exodus 20:17) The character of this crime, as stated by Peter, is an endeavor "to lie to the Holy Spirit," and "put the Spirit of the Lord to the test." People must be careful not to test the knowledge and holiness and justice and power of God.

The motives for these sins were probably love of money, greed, and the love of praise, self pride. (1 John 2:16) this at a time when the followers were sacrificing with generosity, Ananias wished to retain his wealth in a deceptive manner by pretending to give to the church all that he had. Ananias expected to henceforth draw continually upon the fund provided for the poor. Ananias wanted to be seen as a generous man giving to the needs of the church without the willingness to trust God's providence. He was as the Pharisees, appearing to be righteous but inwardly a sinful man. Their obedience to such impulses and their compact in sin show Ananias and Sapphira to have been unbelievers and hypocrites.

It is not too difficult to understand the severity of the punishment which visited upon Ananias and Sapphira. By a direct visitation of divine power they were smitten with instant death. God will protect His Church from imposters and intruders, so we read that consequently "none of the rest dared to associate with them." The believers show a noticeable effect as well, "And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things."

This is the first time the word Church is used in the book of Acts. This seems to emphasize the supreme lesson of the story that the church as a body witnessing for Christ must be kept pure and holy. It should also be added that in no way is consecration more fairly tested than by the practice of individual Christians in the matter of tithes and offerings.

Verses 12-16

The rapid increase in numbers of converts to the Christian faith was the reason for the persecution of the church. This daily growth in the believers caused envy in the Sadducees. This massive growth was due in no small measure to the extraordinary miracles preformed by the apostles, and to the testimony, which these miracles accredited, that were preformed daily in Solomon's porch within the precincts of the Temple. The news of this activity spread to every part of the city. The excitement that was created spread out of Jerusalem into the neighboring cities which also brought their sick and demon possessed, and everyone was healed.

Verses 17-25

The Jewish rulers, the Sadducees, whose threats had been disregarded, became mad with jealousy and hatred, seized the apostles "They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail" intending to bring them to public trial and to death. But during the night an angel frees them and sends them back to preach in the Temple the gospel message which is beautifully designated as "message of this Life." The Lord of Host is a reference in the Bible that means that God has a army of angles at His command. We should not question when we read that angels come down and serve the Christian, as the Lord's angels are always busy working the will of God. Christians would do well to believe more implicitly in the protecting power of those "ministering spirits" which are "sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation." (Hebrews 1:14) The officers who reported the disappearance of the arrested believers gave no explanation to the Jewish council. We can be sure that wonder and distress filled the council when word came that the apostles were again back in the Temple teaching the people.

Verses 26-32

The apostles are again arrested. The reproofs of the Jewish rulers indicate their helpless anxiety and the reply of the apostles display their confidence. The judges take the place of accused criminals; they complain that the apostles are attempting to bring upon them the responsibility for the death of Jesus. Peter startles them with his answer. He boldly charges them with murder for having secured the crucifixion of Jesus. Then Peter he declares that Jesus has risen, that He occupies the place of supreme power, and that through His name pardon can be secured for those who repent. The apostles being witnesses to these events are one with the Holy Spirit. Peter startles them even more with the bold words, "We must obey God rather than men." Peter has divided the council on one side and God and the followers of Christ on the other. This is not only a defiance of his judges but a bold declaration that the Christian Church is independent of the Jewish State.

Verses 33-39

The Jewish leadership were enraged but Gamaliel's reasoning somewhat curbed their wrath and probably saved the lives of the apostles. Gamaliel was a Pharisee of wide respect and recognized ability. Even in a council made up of Sadducees Gamaliel's words carried conviction and largely determined the decision reached. Gamaliel counseled inaction, delay, and caution. "I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or [e]action is of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them." Gamaliel's argument came with two historic examples of popular uprisings which had failed, those of Theudas and Judas, but of whom not many years ago had appealed to the national hopes of the Jews, had attempted to rebel against the power of Rome, and had perished miserably. This too would be the fate of the apostles unless they were bearers of a divine message. Gamaliel's council was not complete, it

was not wholly courageous, it did not offer to weigh evidence and to discover truth, but it was far more than the intolerance which is so often the essence of persecution and bigotry. It allowed time for the right of the cause to be tested. This kind of advise is often needed, it is always better than violence, or the suggestion that might makes right.

Verses 40-42

Only in part did the council take the advices of Gamaliel. The council had decided t let the apostles go free but not without a beating first. This was probable the first physical suffering the apostles had to suffer for the name of Christ. The apostles were undaunted and considered themselves blessed to be worthy to suffer for their Lord. The apostles continued boldly their testimony for Jesus Christ. God had set His approval on their declaration of freedom from the Jewish State, and had assured them of His power and purpose to deliver the Church as it bore its witness for Christ.

Key Verses

1 John 2:16 Hebrews 1:14 Exodus 20:15 Exodus 20:17

Chapter 6

Verses 1-7

As with any organization, growth will cause difficulty between the different groups of people. This is the case in the first recorded conflict of the early church. "A complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food." The complaint of the Hellenistic Jews was probably well founded but was not necessarily an intentional fault. If it was a case of ethnic deprivation then there would most like been a punishment recorded as part of the solution applied. The problem was most likely a language barrier between two different groups, the native Hebrews and the Hellenistic Jews. It is a tendency to overlook those whom we cannot communicate with. Also the growing numbers of the believers were becoming too large for the apostles to administer to all their needs. It does appear that the Greek speaking Christians were suspicious and this did threatened serious trouble.

Hellenistic Jews

The 'Hellenistic Jews' were those Greek speaking Jewish Christians in the early church in Jerusalem. The Hellenists probably interpreted the Torah less stringently than did the 'Hebrews,' The Hellenistic Jews probably could not speak Aramaic which was the native tongue of Jews living in Israel. They probably were reared outside the land and were bilingual, speaking both Greek and their native tongues.

The apostles showed great wisdom in meeting the difficulty, as they called a church meeting and advised the election the election of seven men to be entrusted with the task of overseeing the poor. This could be seen as the very start of church government and it seems to be of a democratic form. The government was not a clerical despotism but a Christian republic. The election of these seven men was by the people but the new officers were ordained by the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands upon them, to indicate that they were solemnly appointed to their task. We should note that there is a distinction between the two offices of the church. One office was to “serve tables,” to administer the finances and to care for the needy. The other office was to devote itself to preaching and prayer.

The apostles further stated what the character of the men who were qualified to serve as these officers in the church; even though their ministry was to be concerned with finances and temporal affairs. They were to be "men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom." Integrity and wisdom were not enough, spirituality was also required.

All seven men who were chosen were of Greek names. This does not prove that they were all Greeks, as it was common for Jews to have Greek names as well as found in the twelve apostles. It may indicate that most of them were Greek speaking and may have been chosen to please the party which had felt aggrieved.

The effect of this new regulation at once was manifested in a more rapid growth in the church. This was due to the fact that a new spirit of harmony had been produced, and furthering the fact that the apostles were now able to devote themselves wholly to the preaching of the gospel. Even "a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith," those who had much to lose by a change in their faith. The conversions of priests most forcibly emphasized the swift advance of the Christian cause.

It is quite probable that this incident is the origin of the office of “deacon.” The seven were not so designated, but the duties they performed were those of the deacons of the early church, and it is natural to conclude that this important form of Christian service was first organized at this time.

The paragraph is full of suggestions for the guidance of such officers and also for all who are interested in the matter of church benevolence.

1. It is the duty of the church to provide for its needy members.
2. Discrimination and care must be given that the most worthy are not neglected.
3. Relief should include personal contact and sympathy, and should not be mechanical and institutional. It should be a comfort and lead to self-support.
4. The work demands the appointment of special officers. The minister must be relieved of raising and expending funds.
5. The minister must be allowed to spend his time in study, preaching, and in prayer.

6. Relief of the poor, or social service should never take the place of evangelistic effort.
7. All church officers are in a true sense ministers or servants and not lords or masters in the church. In whatever service they are involved they should seek to bear testimony for Christ.

Stephen

Stephen, the first martyr of Christianity, was, according to the Acts of the Apostles, a deacon in the early church at Jerusalem who aroused the enmity of members of various synagogues by his teachings. Accused of blasphemy, at his trial he made a long speech fiercely denouncing the Jewish authorities who were sitting in judgment on him and was stoned to death. His martyrdom was witnessed by Saul of Tarsus (later renamed Paul), a Pharisee who would later convert to Christianity and become an apostle.

Verses 8-15

Stephen had been appointed to care for the needy believers in order that the apostles might be unhampered in their work of preaching; yet his own public witness for Christ was so bold, so clear, so concerning, that it was sealed by martyrdom and marked an epoch in the history of the church. The story of this layman of the church emphasizes the truth that the evangelization of the world can never be accomplished by ordained ministers, unless their testimony is supplemented by that of all members of the church according to their ability and opportunity.

Stephen's character is well sketched, "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit." Stephen was "full of grace and power." Stephen's power from the Spirit manifested itself in the working of "great wonders and signs among the people," as also evidenced in his burning eloquence and his skill in argument. A skill Stephen displayed, as he witnessed for Christ before men in their place of worship. This was in the "Synagogue of the Freedmen, including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia." The Libertines were descendants of Jews who had been carried captive to Rome a century earlier and afterwards made freemen. The Cyrenians and the Alexandrians came from North Africa, Cilicia and Asia were provinces of modern Asia Minor. The mention of Cilicia is most significant, as its capital was Tarsus, and from that city there was now in Jerusalem a young Pharisee named Saul. It is certain that Saul encountered Stephen in the synagogue, and that meeting affected both his own life and the history of the world.

The leaders of the synagogue opposed Stephen, "they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking." The leader's jealousy and anger developed into deadly and murderous hate. They used bribery to have men who had heard to say that Stephen "speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God." They stirred up the people as well as the rulers against Stephen, and they arranged his arrest and arraignment before the chief counsel of the Jews.

It is difficult from this narrative to understand exactly the nature of the charge against Stephen. Evidently it was partly true but his words had been perverted, and a charge of this kind is always more difficult to meet.

The defense that follows it is clear that in testifying for Jesus Stephen had predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, the passing away of Judaism, the universal character of Christianity, and the return of the Lord. But these truths had been misinterpreted and misstated as to ground the accusation of blasphemy. Previously only the Sadducees were bitter against the leaders of the church, but now it is easy to see how the people and the Pharisees were now aroused, the former out of jealousy for the city and the Temple to which they owed their livelihood, the latter because of their zeal for the Law and sanctity of which, they believed, had been attacked. Now, if ever, Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit; "all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel." As witnesses for Christ we must expect opposition, hatred, and slander, but His Spirit will give them wisdom and strength in the hour of need.

Chapter 7

Verses 1-60

Stephen presented a historical argument against the charge of blasphemy that was brought against him by the Jewish rulers. In Stephen's argument he presented his points in such a way that the judges were convicted of criminal unbelief. First of all Stephen's argument showed his wisdom. It was an argument that retained their interest and restrained the wrath of a hostile council of Jews. The judges would be interested and listen to the stories of their own patriarchs and heroes. Each statement and incident was a link in the chain of logic, and when the conclusion was stated it was held fast by every sentence which had previously been spoken. Stephen vindicated himself and convicted the rulers, so that when its climax was reached there was little for them to do but either to kill their accuser or to confess their sin.

There were two parallel themes in Stephen's argument. (1) The revelation of God had always been progressive, and had never been confined to the Temple. (2) The messengers of God had always been rejected at first, but had been received latter as divinely appointed deliverers. The first is summarized in the words: "The Most High dwelled not in houses made in hands" the second in the statement: "As your fathers did, so do ye." The first shows Stephen innocent of blasphemy and the second convicts his judges of opposing the will of God.

1. The charge against Stephen was blasphemy for declaring that God could be worshiped without a Temple and its rites. Stephen reviewing the sacred history reminded his hearers in the first sentence that "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia." When God first appeared to

Abraham it was outside of the holy land and not in the Temple. God revealed Himself to Joseph in Egypt, and to Moses in the wilderness. Solomon during the prayer of dedication reminded the people that the Most High could not be confined to the precincts of any building. Which each step the revelation of God had become more perfect and reached its culmination in Christ. First God revealed Himself through a man, then a nation, then ceremonially, and finally I His Son. Toward the appearance of the Messiah all Jewish history had moved towards its goal. Now through Christ believers can worship God not only in the sacred mountain and the Temple, but wherever they turn to Jesus in "Spirit and Truth." God has a message for us even when surrounded by pagans and unbelievers, as Abraham in Mesopotamia, or Joseph when imprisoned in Egypt, in the wilderness as Moses, in the ritual of the tabernacle, or when bowing in the beauties of the Temple as Solomon. All of our experiences should be interpreted as designed to point us to Christ, and to lead us to find fellowship with God in Him.

2. Secondly, Stephen shows how unbelief has always been slow to accept the message and messengers of God. Even Abraham tarried at Haran until his father had died. Joseph was sold into slavery by envious brothers but later proved to be the family's savior. Moses was driven into exile by his unbelieving nation, and even when he had brought them to Sinai he was deserted by them. Jesus had appeared, as the divine Son of God as was envied by these Jewish rulers, and by them He had been rejected and crucified, but someday He would return and be welcomed by a repentant people. The rulers, in the blind attachment to Moses, whom Stephen was accused of blaspheming because he proclaimed Christ, were really opposing Moses, as he had predicted the coming Christ. The rulers claimed to be zealous for the Law, but they were breaking the spirit of the Law, and in their opposition to His Son they were really opposing and defying God. Today anyone who rejects Jesus as the Christ is opposing God, and is excluding in his life the One who alone can bring salvation. Someday Christ will return and He who was mocked and crucified will be hailed as universal King and all the world will rejoice in the gladness of His reign.

Stephen's defense and his two great arguments have converged to a single point. The judges suddenly realized that every historic reference Stephen had used indicated the divine mission of Jesus Christ. Also Stephen had emphasized their guilt and shame in rejecting and crucifying Jesus Christ. No wonder they were "they were cut to the quick" and "they began gnashing their teeth at him" and "driven him out of the city, they began stoning him."

They acted in blind rage and with heartless cruelty. The helpless victim, according to custom, was placed on a high rock, with hands tied behind his back, and pushed forward

that he might be killed by the fall. But Stephen still lived and knelt to pray, and they rushed upon him with stones and crushed him to death.

In Stephen's hour of peril and anguish he was full of the Holy Spirit and experienced what has been granted to other innocent sufferers who have testified boldly for Christ. First there was a clearer vision of his Lord. Stephen "saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." Such a vision has been seen through the eye of faith to many heroes who have borne their bold testimony for Christ.

Stephen was given a forgiving spirit. Like Jesus he was able to pray: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" only the power of Christ allows one so to pray.

The peace of Christ ruled in Stephen's heart at the time of his agony. Amid the hail of stones and the shouts of hatred, "he fell asleep."

Stephen received the "crown of Life." His name means "crown" and we can be sure that this awaited him, as it awaits all who are true to their Lord and look for His appearing. Stephen also received a reward of priceless value in the influence that came from the witness of this first martyr. There was present as a witness "a young man named Saul." It is probably true that "if Stephen had not so prayed, Paul had not preached," and it is beyond question that the brightest crown that falls to those who suffer for the name of Christ consists in the imperishable influence which falls upon those who witness their heroism and courage.

Judea and Samaria

Chapter 8

Verses 1-25

Stephen's death had an immediate and startling consequence. The fires of a fierce persecution were lit. Saul of Tarsus was the leader of this persecution. The persecution resulted in the scattering abroad of the Christians "throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria." The persecution involved pain, sorrow, separation, sufferings, and loss. Yet it caused a wider spreading of the Gospel message. Until now the church had not made effort to preach the gospel beyond the city of Jerusalem. Stephen's death and the persecution that it caused made occasion of the movement which was to carry the good news of salvation "unto the uttermost part of the earth."

The first seven chapters of Acts show how the church was founded; but its witness for Christ was confined to the city of Jerusalem, and all the converts were of Jewish birth. These next five chapters tell how the gospel spread to Judea and Samaria and even as far north as Antioch, and how Gentiles were admitted to membership in the church. This

is a period of transition, as the horizon of the church is broadening, and preparation is being made for the great missionary journeys of Paul, which fill the remaining chapters. The material of these intermediate chapters is grouped around the names of Phillip-, Saul, Peter, Cornelius, Barnabas, and Herod.

Phillip

Philip the Evangelist appears several times in the Acts of the Apostles. He was one of the Seven Deacons chosen to care for the poor of the Christian community in Jerusalem (Acts 6). He preached and performed miracles in Samaria, and met and baptized an Ethiopian man, a eunuch, in Gaza, traditionally marking the start of the Ethiopian Church (Acts 8). Later, he lived in Caesarea Maritima with his four daughters who prophesied where he was visited by Paul (Acts 21).

Phillip was one of the seven deacons, who was subsequently known as “the evangelist.” No other name on the New Testament is associated with the title of evangelist. Phillip was, of course, not the only evangelist. Phillips work was so distinctive that a study of his career reveals the great principles relative to evangelistic preaching and methods, and emphasizes particularly the power of the Spirit upon whom success in such work ultimately depends.

All believers should become evangelist, as we read that "and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles," and "Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word." The use of the word therefore is of significance. It was because of the fierce persecution that had burst upon the church, because of banishment and exile and homelessness and weary wanderings, that these early Christians carried “the good news” beyond the confines of Jerusalem. God often overrules evil for good; in the darkness of shadows Christians have often seen the path of duty more clearly. Even at such a great cost the gospel message has ever been carried to the regions beyond.

From the fugitives of Jerusalem many were faithful, but none became as famous as Phillip. Phillip fled to Samaria and there with such power proclaimed the faith for which he had been persecuted that the resulting events have been called “the Samaritan Pentecost.” As the crowds gathered they listened to Phillip’s testimony concerning Christ; the truth of the message was attested by marvelous miracles; great numbers were converted, and "there was much rejoicing in that city," as there is in every city that the gospel is faithfully proclaimed.

It is significant that a Jew was preaching to the Samaritans, and the Samaritans were rejoicing in the message of a Jew. Jews were not supposed to have any dealings with the Samaritans. Until now Jewish converts had only preached to men of their own race. Even this would be less startling that the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles. Samaritans

were despised by the Jews of Judea, yet they were only half heathen and their religion was a debased Judaism. This was a large step in the broadening of the church but it was an easy step to make. It was also a natural transitional step to the position that Gentiles and Jews could form one body in Christ. Race prejudices still exist today and some Christians take a provincial view of the mission of the church. It is necessary for us today to enforce the lessons of this chapter and of the chapters which immediately follow.

It is also significant that the man who became known as the evangelist was a layman, as many of his greatest successors have been. The example is a summons, not to disregard ordination, for Phillip was ordained as an officer in the church and in this view of his mental and spiritual attainments, but as a summons to employ every natural ability and every providential opportunity to witness faithfully for Christ.

The evangelist, Phillip, took the gospel where it had never before been proclaimed; his work was that of today's modern missionary, and the term evangelist is used most exactly where it describes one who labors among those whom the good news of salvation has not otherwise been brought.

Two striking incidents attest to the accomplishments of Phillip in Samaria. The first is the experience of Simon, the sorcerer, and the second is the new gift of the Holy Spirit.

Simon Magus, in the traditions of the early centuries, was a reputed enemy of the church. Simon appears here as a clever and unscrupulous magician, who by his arts and deceptions has played upon the ignorance and credulity of his followers so that they might accept his crude and mystical teachings, and more importantly might enrich him by their gifts. Simon had so impressed the people that they regarded him as an incarnation of divine power and even calling him "the Great Power of God." Phillip's success is evidenced by the fact that people turned from Simon to him and even "Simon himself believed; and after being baptized," and he continued on with Phillip. Simon's belief was imperfect, as the sequel shows that he experienced neither true repentance nor faith. Simon's influence over the people was destroyed, and he himself was convinced that in the name of Jesus there was a power he himself had never known. Simon is the symbol of the false religious teachers, past and present, mystical, deceiving, selfish, who have opposed the gospel, but have been overcome by its power.

Peter and John were sent from Jerusalem because of the new of many Samaritan converts and had come to investigate the work of Phillip. There Peter and John laid their hands upon the new believers and the gift of the Holy Spirit fell upon them. This gift does not here denote the usual influence of the Spirit which results in repentance and faith, and holiness, but the extraordinary and miraculous "gifts" which were frequently bestowed upon believers, particularly in the early days of the Apostolic Church. The apostles had no power to confer these gifts; but the fact that they prayed for their bestowal shows that

the apostles recognized the fact that the Samaritans had actually become Christians. In this the apostles gave their sanction to the new step which Phillip had taken in preaching the gospel to those who were not Jews.

The mission of Peter and John, their prayer, and the miraculous gifts, also demonstrated the unity of the church. It confirmed that there were real converts in Samaria and that they belonged to the same body of Christians in Jerusalem, and that they recognized the leadership of the apostles. In all evangelistic work those who profess conversion should be examined by church officers and should be brought into the organized life of the church.

The interval of time between the acceptance of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit is not to teach that spiritual life or gifts or graces come from "laying on of the apostles' hands," nor does it support the theory that there is always an interval between conversion and the "fullness of the Spirit," or the "baptism of the Spirit," nor that converts must seek a "second blessing." More typical is the case of Cornelius and his friends the gift came without the laying on of hands and before any interval of time had elapsed. The experience of the Samaritans was exceptional and was intended to teach that, as miraculous gifts might be withheld for a time from true converts, so in the future, as in the present day, conversion might be quite as real even though attended by no miracles or signs.

The heart of Simon Magus was revealed in his interview with Peter and emphasizes his complete discomfiture and defeat. Simon wanted to purchase the power to confer these supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit from the apostles, this suggests his intention to sell the same. Peter knew the intention of Simon's heart and called for him into repentance, but intimate that there is small hope that Simon will or can change his evil course. Simon's reply to Peter expresses fear but no real contrition; it indicates, however, how completely Simon, the popular leader, has been discredited and silenced.

As the apostles journey back to Jerusalem they now turn to evangelism. They themselves being Jews proclaim the gospel "gospel to many villages of the Samaritans." The apostles are reaching out beyond their first call to Jerusalem and soon will rejoice that the Gentiles also hear the good news that is being preached.

Verses 26-40

An angel of the Lord suddenly summons Phillip to the desert hills of southern Judea. Now instead of addressing multitudes of people Phillip is being sent to share the gospel with one man. This task is no less difficult and to the Master is no less important. The man who preaches Christ to eager crowds is no more truly an evangelist than he who testifies for his Lord to a chance acquaintance on a lonely journey. The results of each effort are known only to God. On the road that led from Jerusalem to Gaza Phillip found the chancellor of the exchequer of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This Ethiopian would

become a Christian missionary to the continent of Africa. Phillip and the apostles, having learned that the gospel was to be preached in Samaria as well as in Jerusalem, were again reminded they were to be witnesses “unto the uttermost parts of the earth.”

Phillip might have hesitated to offer Christ to a pagan. This man although not a Jew by birth, was surely no heathen, as he had been to Jerusalem to “worship.” Phillip found him reading the Old Testament book of Isaiah. This man was exactly the one to make the step easy which changed the Christians from missionaries among the Jews to witnesses in the entire world.

In the narrative we find guidance a encouragement for those who are willing, in private, personal conversation, to “do the work of an evangelist.”

1. Opportunities come in the most unexpected places. Phillip who was accustomed to the throngs in Samaria, the desert road to Gaza must have seemed to promise a poor field of labor. It is here that Phillip met the Ethiopian prince. To those who are willing to follow divine guidance surprising openings for testimony are certain to appear.
2. Opportunities can be fleeting. The Spirit told Phillip to “go,” and Phillip ran.” Had the chariot the Ethiopian was riding in passed by it would have been gone forever. Our work for Christ demands immediate obedience to every prompting of His Spirit.
3. To all who obey the voice of the Spirit the way is prepared. Phillip drew near to the chariot and the eunuch was reading the “prophet Isaiah,” and he had opened the book to the fifty-third chapter. How could he have been more perfectly prepared for the message the evangelist would bring? One who is sent by the Lord to witness will find the Master had gone before to prepare the heart of the hearer.
4. In addition to the scriptures a human teacher is needed if the way of salvation is to be made plain. There are exceptions but the rule is expressed by the Ethiopian prince. He had the written word, but when Phillip asked whether he understood he replied, “Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?”
5. Phillip’s message embodied the heart of the gospel. Phillip declared that Jesus was the suffering Savior, the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world. This is the burden of the good news proclaimed by every evangelist.
6. The words of Phillip evidently included instruction about baptism. Evangelism must aim to secure an open profession of faith on the part of everyone who accepts Christ.
7. Suddenly Phillip “the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away” from the rejoicing convert, and passed away to Caesarea which became his home. Phillip next appears as the host who is entertaining missionaries and training his daughters to testify for Christ. this suggest a third form of evangelistic service. One may be called to preach to thousands as was Phillip in Samaria, or even to speak to one man as in the desert of Judea. Phillip may be evangelizing the world quite as truly

by the aid he gives to religious workers, and by exerting the abiding influence of a Christian home.

Paul / Saul of Tarsus

The Apostle Paul, who started as one of Christianity's most zealous enemies, was hand-picked by Jesus Christ to become the gospel's most ardent messenger. Paul traveled tirelessly through the ancient world, taking the message of salvation to the Gentiles. Paul towers as one of the all-time giants of Christianity.

Paul was born about 5 AD. By birth he was a Roman citizen, as was his father. (Acts 22:25-29 Acts 16:37) His was a devout Jewish family in the city of Tarsus—one of the largest trade centers on the Mediterranean coast. It had been in existence several hundred years prior to his birth. It was renowned for its university, one in which students could receive a superior education. During the time of Alexander the Great, Tarsus was the most influential city in Asia Minor.

Stoicism was the dominant philosophy there. In addition to his becoming steeped in Orthodox Pharisaic Judaism, his early life in Tarsus allowed him to learn "Classic Greek", Greek philosophy, and Koine Greek which was the lingua franca of the Roman Empire, spoken by the common people. In his letters, Paul reflected heavily from his knowledge of Stoic philosophy, using Stoic terms and metaphors to assist his new Gentile converts in their understanding of the revealed word of God. He would also rely heavily on the training he received concerning the law and the prophets, utilizing this knowledge to convince his Jewish countrymen of the unity of past Old Testament prophecy and covenants with the fulfilling of these in Jesus Christ. His wide spectrum of experiences and education gave the "Apostle to the Gentiles" (Romans 1:5 Romans 11:13 Gal. 2:8) the tools which he later would use to effectively spread the Gospel and to establish the church solidly in many parts of the Roman Empire.

Paul referred to himself as being "of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee". (Phil. 3:5)

However, the Bible reveals very little about Paul's family. Paul's nephew, his sister's son, is mentioned in Acts 23:16. Acts also quotes Paul indirectly referring to his father by saying he, Paul, was "a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee". (Acts 23:6) Paul refers to his mother in Romans 16:13 as among those at Rome. In Romans 16:7 he states that his relatives, Andronicus and Junia, were Christians before he was and were prominent among the apostles.

The family had a history of religious piety. (2 Timothy 1:3) Apparently the family lineage had been very attached to Pharisaic traditions and observances for generations. (Philippians 3:5-6) Young Saul learned how to make the mohair with which tents were made. (Acts 18:1-3) Later as a Christian missionary, that trade became a

means of support for him, one that he could practice anywhere. It also was to become an initial connection with Priscilla and Aquila with whom he would partner in tent making (Acts 18:3) and later become very important teammates as fellow missionaries.(Romans 16:4)

While he was still fairly young, he was sent to Jerusalem to receive his education at the school of Gamaliel, (Acts 22:3) one of the most noted rabbis in history. The Hillel school was noted for giving their students a balanced education, likely giving Paul broad exposure to classical literature, philosophy, and ethics. Some of his family may have resided in Jerusalem since later the son of one of his sisters saved his life there.(Acts 23:16) Nothing more is known of his background until he takes an active part in the martyrdom of Stephen.(Acts 7:58-60;22:20) Paul confesses that "beyond measure" he persecuted the church of God prior to his conversion.(Gal. 1:13-14) (Phil. 3:6) (Acts 8:1-3)

When Saul saw the resurrected Jesus Christ on the Damascus Road, Saul converted to Christianity. He made three long missionary journeys throughout the Roman Empire, planting churches, preaching the gospel, and giving strength and encouragement to early Christians. Of the 27 books in the New Testament, Paul is credited as the author of 13 of them. While he was proud of his Jewish heritage, Paul saw that the gospel was for the Gentiles as well. Paul was martyred for his faith in Christ by the Romans, about 64 or 65 A.D.

Paul had a brilliant mind, a commanding knowledge of philosophy and religion, and could debate with the most educated scholars of his day. At the same time, his clear, understandable explanation of the gospel made his letters to early churches the foundation of Christian theology. Tradition portrays Paul as a physically small man, but he endured enormous physical hardships on his missionary journeys. His perseverance in the face of danger and persecution has inspired countless missionaries since.

Chapter 9

Verses 1-30

An event of supreme importance in the history of the church and of the world was the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, who is better known as Paul the Apostle. The prominent place given to its record in the book of Acts gives us this conclusion. The record is three times repeated, first as written by Luke for his Christian readers, second as told by Paul to a mob of Jews, and third, as rehearsed by the apostle in the presence of the Roman rulers.

The story has a deep significance for us today. First, it affords one of the strongest evidences of the truth of the Christian faith; for how can one account for the career of

Paul if he was not so converted, and how would we account for his conversion if Jesus the crucified is not the divine and risen Christ? Secondly, the story is full of encouragement to all who witness for Christ; for Paul was brought into Christian life and service by the testimony of an obscure disciple named Ananias, and the suggestion is evident that faithful effort may result in the conversion of one whose career may influence generations and races of men. Thirdly, the immediate public confession of Christ on the part of Saul is an example which should give to faint hearted, secret believer's courage to act in accordance with their convictions.

Luke has placed this story in Acts at a place which describes the preparation of the church for its worldwide witness. It is here that Luke shows how a new apostle was chosen and appointed as the principle messenger to the Gentile world. By the providence of God Saul had been prepared for his task, Paul was Jewish by birth, but also possessed Roman citizenship, spending his early years under the influence of Greek culture in the university city of Tarsus, and latter trained in the knowledge of the sacred scriptures as a student in Jerusalem, Paul's experiences adapted him to appreciate all the elements and phases of thought and belief which entered in the life of the world in the age to which he belonged.

Paul's character qualified him for this service. Paul had a strong intellect, tender emotions, and possessing a genius for religion. Paul's personality was interesting, compelling, and forceful. At the time of Paul's conversion he was in the full maturity of his powers, favorably known in Jerusalem, and occupying a position of wide influence. The event is connected with the death of Stephen and the persecution that followed. Luke's narration is fixed (1) upon Saul's conviction of sin, (2) upon his acceptance of Christ, and (3) upon his confession of faith.

1. Saul's vision of the risen and glorified Christ wrought in the soul a deep conviction of sin. It brings out a truth that a man may be sincere and moral, even intensely religious, and yet be stained with guilt. Outwardly Paul was blameless, Paul was zealous for the faith of his fathers, and Paul was certain that he was doing God service. Paul had no qualm of conscience as he arrested, tortured, and caused to blaspheme, all who had accepted the new faith. Paul had given his vote to have them put to death. Paul was so intent in his zeal that he even pursued them even to foreign cities. It was on such a quest, armed with letters from the High Priest, and on his way to the city of Damascus, that suddenly there burst upon him a light surpassing the brightness of the Syrian sun at noonday, and heard the voice of the Lord saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Saul replied, "Who are you, Lord?" and the Lord answered, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Saul actually saw Christ. This experience of Saul was no mere mental impression, no hallucination, no feverish fancy induced by sunstroke. Saul claimed to be a witness of the resurrection a fact he based his apostolic authority.

The words of the Lord so convicted Saul that one that persecuted His followers was guilty of offering violence to the Lord of glory. An attempt to oppose Christ is to endeavor to destroy His church. Instantly Saul appreciated the whole truth. Jesus was the divine Son of God. Saul realized he had committed an incomparable crime; he himself was the chief of all sinners. Saul rises from the ground, blind and helpless, and in spiritual bewilderment and darkness. But the Lord has given Saul a word of promise, "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." For Saul new light is sure to come, as he has submitted his will to the will of the Lord.

2. Saul had accepted Christ as his personal Savior, and in the case of Saul came the guidance of an obscure Jewish convert in Damascus named Ananias. At first Ananias hesitated to go, as he feared the cruel persecutor who had come to the city for the express purpose of arresting all who professed to follow Christ. Ananias reluctance was overcome by the assurance of the great work that Paul was destined to achieve.

Ananias found the way prepared for him, as usual in such cases. Saul was in prayer and was expecting Ananias, who explained to his eager listener the gospel of grace, the forgiveness of sins, the necessity of baptism, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. As Saul accepted the truth, his eyes were opened and the blindness of his soul was removed, his sins washed away, and at the touch of Ananias hand Saul was filled with the Holy Spirit. It is noticeable that this all came about at the hands of a layman and was independent of the apostles. The journey of Saul has now begun, he is a new apostle and chosen in a Gentile city to be the supreme witness for Christ unto the uttermost part of the Gentile world.

3. Saul's confession of faith was immediate and heroic. It is something that should be pondered by all who hesitate to acknowledge their secret allegiance to Christ. Saul's confession surprised the whole city of Damascus. One should not fear what men may say or thing if he is secure in the will of the Lord. Saul's confession did cause danger for him, as a plot was conceived against his life, and Saul was compelled to flee for his life in the cover of the night. None need to expect to enter the Kingdom of heaven without persecution and opposition. It exposed Saul to suspicion and misunderstanding a common experience for those who confess their Christian faith. In fact, many a person hesitates to make such confession for fear of being regarded as hypocrites. The disciples in Jerusalem regarded Saul as an imposter and a spy. It is better to have the world regard us as false when we know we are sincere, than to have the world trust us when we in our hearts we know we are untrue to the Christ we are afraid to confess, as a secret believer is a hypocrite.

Confession resulted in unequaled usefulness. Driven from Jerusalem as he had been from Damascus, Saul returned to the city of his birth. One's home is always the first and best place for Christian testimony. As time passed Paul was called to assist Barnabas in Antioch and from there he passed on to a career of testimony which has changed the currents of human history. Today the world is waiting for the blessed influence of such men, who have the courage of their convictions, and who in all the relations of life will be openly loyal to their divine Master.

Verses 31-43

After the conversion of Paul there was a season of rest and growth for the Christian church. Since the death of Stephen the history has been concerned chiefly with the work of Phillip and the mission of Ananias, both laymen. This does not mean that the apostles were idle. The ministry of the apostles has been passed almost in complete silence, because the church was being prepared by other agents for its wider testimony. We do find the journeys of Peter recorded, for they brought him to Joppa, within call of Caesarea, in which city he was to perform the supreme work of this period of transition. Peter was to open the door of the church for the reception of Gentile believers.

Peter progressed through Judea and strengthened the church, secured new converts, and worked to notable miracles. Peter healed Aeneas, who was sick with the palsy. This recalls some of the most memorable scenes in the life of Christ, by whose power this sufferer was now relieved. The cure was so miraculous that it resulted in the conversion of a multitude in Lydda and Sharon.

Of Dorcas, or Tabitha, nothing is known except this one startling story. Death had overtaken her in the midst of a life of blessed ministry and helpfulness. Her friends, in distress, but evidently in faith, summoned Peter to Joppa. In answer to Peter's prayer the sleeping saint awoke. The raising of life was the most marvelous miracle the apostles had preformed. No wonder that it brought faith to many hearts, and that as its result "many believed on the Lord."

The Conversion of Cornelius

Cornelius was probably not the first Gentile to be converted to Christianity but is the first that is recorded. The Cyprian and Gyrenian missionaries may have preached previously to Greeks in Antioch, Acts 11:19-20. An apostle, under divine guidance, goes to preach to a Roman officer, and here Gentiles are formally welcomed into the church. Here the legitimacy of Gentile Christianity is recognized and established. This is one of the turning point in Christian history, and an outstanding feature in the period when the church was being prepared for its worldwide witness.

At first only the Jews were evangelized, then Samaritans, but now a representative Gentile and a large circle of friends are led to accept Christ and are filled with the Holy Spirit, so this incident is known as the “Roman Pentecost.”

Chapter 10

Verses 1-8

Cornelius the centurion was in command of a military company known as the Italian band, or cohort. He was stationed in the capital city of Caesarea. Cornelius like the other three centurions mentioned in the New Testament was a man of high character. He was a man who feared God and his sincere piety had inspired a like faith in all his household. Cornelius gave generously to his Jewish neighbors whom other Romans despised and abused. He was also a man of prayer, and in the midst of his busy life he observed the regular periods prescribed by the Jews at nine and twelve and three o'clock daily. While Cornelius was praying an angel appeared and instructed him to send to Joppa for Peter who would tell him words whereby he and his family might be saved. (Acts 11:13,14)

This section of Acts narrates three notable conversions: that of the Ethiopian prince, of Saul, and of Cornelius. All of these men were Godly men, they were not only of reproachable morality but they were zealously religious. Are such men lost? Is it absolutely necessarily today for men of this character to experience a new birth? These narratives seem to affirm that they do, and they remind us of the words of our Lord to Nicodemus, “You must be born again.” (John 3:7)

We should not here that men of this character who live according to the light they have, more light is surely to be given, and when this new light comes they are surly to accept it. Our sincerity of faith will always be tested as Christ is the touchstone of character.

For Cornelius, the source of new light was revealed by an angel, his sincerity was tested by the speed with which he sent to summon the appointed messenger. The angels visit emphasized the importance of the event which was to follow, the opening of the church to Gentiles believers; but the fact that the angel did not point the way to salvation is also to be noted. Cornelius was to send for Peter, calls to mind the important truth that the gospel message, on which salvation depends, is to be proclaimed, not by supernatural messengers, but by men to their fellow men.

Verses 9-23

By God’s providence Peter was in calling distance from Cornelius. Peter might have consented to preaching to Gentiles, but would have refused to eat with them or to accept them into the brotherhood of the church. There was a wide gulf between the Jews and the Gentiles, much greater than can be imagined today. To the Jew the Gentile was an abomination; his touch defiled, his customs were abhorrent, and his religion was a

blasphemy. Peter needed to have his prejudices removed before he could be willing to undertake his work. The Lord gave Peter a vision to teach him that those whom God might cleanse should not be regarded as unclean.

Peter went to the housetop of Simon the tanner in Joppa to pray. As it is the noon hour, Peter becomes hungry and is increasingly so as dinner is delayed. Peter falls into a trance and a vessel is let down from the heavens and is full of animals. Some animals are ceremonially clean and fit for food, other, to a Jew, are unclean and not to be eaten. The clean animals have been made unclean by contact with the unclean animals, and that is the point of the vision. The vision appears three times and each time a voice from heaven tells Peter to eat and each time Peter refuses; each time Peter is rebuked by the words, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy." Just then the messengers from Cornelius arrive and invite Peter to the home of Cornelius. Before this vision Peter would have refused but now the invitation explains the vision and he is willing to go. By God's command Peter has learned not to shrink from contact with men of other nations, nor fear to accept them as brothers in case God has cleaned their hearts. The first paragraph tells us that even godly men like Cornelius need the gospel message of Jesus Christ. This paragraph also tells us even the despised can be transformed by the power of gospel message. The first qualification needed by a Christian witness is the willingness to speak to anyone to whom they may be sent, and a sympathy as broad as to welcome as brothers believers from every race and nation.

Verses 24-33

When a soul is seeking light, and a messenger is willing to accept any opportunity to share the light of Jesus Christ, a meeting is certain to be arranged. So it was with Peter and Cornelius. Cornelius had calculated the time of Peter's arrival and had invited to his house a large number of his relatives and friends. Peter came from Joppa with the messengers and six Christian witnesses for the events that would follow. Cornelius was ready to worship the messenger that God had sent with the gospel message, but Peter had assured his host that too was only a man. Peter also exclaimed that he had learned to regard no man as common or unclean. Cornelius then explained the circumstances which had led him to summon for Peter and concluded with these striking words: "Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord."

There are two lessons here for each member of the church. First, what effort is each member making to secure for some messenger of Christ such an audience as Cornelius prepared for Peter? Can we not calculate some time and place where the gospel is to be preached, and is it not possible to bring one's relatives and friends? Secondly, when present in a place of worship, cannot each be prepared to say, "we are all here present" – all family and friends, mind as well as body – "before God" – not to be seen by others, not conscious so much as others as of the presence of God – "to hear all" – not to be

amused or to sleep – “have been commanded by the Lord” – not to listen to human conjecture or the exploiting of doubts, but to receive a positive message which is delivered in a reverent spirit and with no prophetic formula: “Thus saith the Lord.” What would happen were all Christian churches filled with such audiences?

Verses 34-43

Peter’s opening sentence has strangely been misunderstood. Peter did not mean that Cornelius was already saved and that all nations of men like Cornelius are saved without knowledge of Jesus Christ, but that through Christ men of all nations can be saved even though they are not Jews. Peter had learned that men like Cornelius are acceptable and can be saved when the gospel of Jesus Christ is presented. Peter still needed to learn that a depraved Gentile could likewise be saved, and not merely the pious, godly, and devout.

Peter began to explain the way to salvation as he told the story and life of Jesus, of His crucifixion and resurrection, and His coming again as a judge. Then Peter exclaimed; "Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins." Peter set forth the condition of salvation, “believes in Him” and the nature of salvation, “forgiveness of sins” this begins the experience which issues in life eternal. In this message is surely found the model for every preacher of every age, and perhaps no age has had a greater need of such clear testimony than the present.

Verses 44-48

While Peter was preaching his sermon the Holy Spirit came and fell upon the hearers and they began to "speaking with tongues" and to "exalting God." What we see happening here is that Cornelius and his family and friends heard the message concerning the saving power of Christ, they accepted Christ and were filled at once with the spirit of Christ. Peter had expected to finish his sermon, to ask those present to confess their faith, to baptize those who believed, and then lay hands on them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. The conversion program was cut short by the Holy Spirit. Here we see an obvious lesson. The work of the Holy Spirit is independent of confession or baptism or the imposition of apostolic hands. Neither does the Holy Spirit need an interval of time between the acceptance of Christ and the reception of His Spirit in all the fullness of His power. The process is that while the preacher is speaking the gospel message the, the hearer yields himself to Christ, a new life is imparted to him, and he is empowered and possessed by the Spirit of the Lord.

Of course, there must be a confession of faith in the rite of baptism, the new life must develop, and there must be repeated refilling of the Spirit. The essential experience is the yielding of the heart to Christ and the consequent transforming of life by the power of His abiding Spirit. Miracles may no longer attend this experience, as they may have been

granted in this instance as a divine authentication of the conversion of Gentiles to faith in Christ and to a new life in Him.

Chapter 11

Verses 1-18

The news of the events in Caesarea traveled fast to the Jewish believers in the church at Jerusalem. None of them would have objected to Peter preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, but Peter had entered their home and had eaten with them, this was his startling offence.

Peter, along with the six Jewish Christian witnesses, presented a logical argument for the events that had happened. First, Peter related the vision of the vessel let down from heaven, and its divine message that what God had made clean men should not regard as unclean.

Second, Peter told them that God had set His seal on the Gentiles by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Thirdly, Peter recalled the words of Jesus which had now come alive to him with new meaning. "John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." If these men had been baptized with the Holy Spirit was it wrong to baptize them with water? Therefore the word "you" had been expanded to include Gentiles also.

Peter's conclusion was no less startling to the Christian Jewish believers in Jerusalem. Men who had been who are truly cleansed and filled with the Holy Spirit should be treated as brothers and recognized as members of the body of Christ. So unanswerable were the arguments, so convincing the facts, that the objectors were satisfied. "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life."

Others who did not hear this testimony of Peter did cause problems in the church, as they insisted that Gentiles who became Christians must observe the Mosaic ritual in order to be saved, or at least be equal with the Jewish Christians. To resolve this question the first church council was called at Jerusalem.

Some members of the Christian church today wish to regard class and race and social distinctions in a spirit quite contrary to the attitude of brotherhood and equality shown by Peter and he admitted the first Gentiles into the fellowship of the Christian church.

Barnabas

His Hellenic Jewish parents called him Joseph, but when he sold all his goods and gave the money to the apostles in Jerusalem, they gave him a new name: Barnabas. This name appears to be from the Aramaic, meaning 'the son (of the) prophet'. However, the Greek text of the Acts 4:36 explains the name as meaning "son of consolation" or "son of

encouragement". A similar link between "prophecy" and "encouragement" is found in Paul's letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 14:3)

Barnabas appears mainly in Acts, a Christian history of the early Christian church. He also appears in several of Paul's epistles. Barnabas is one of the first teachers of the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1). Barnabas was a Levite. He was a native of Cyprus, where he possessed land (Acts 4:36, 37), which he sold, giving the proceeds to the church in Jerusalem.

When Paul returned to Jerusalem after his conversion, Barnabas took him and introduced him to the apostles (Acts 9:27). Easton, in his Bible Dictionary, supposes that they had been fellow students in the school of Rabbi Gamaliel.

The prosperity of the church at Antioch led the apostles and brethren at Jerusalem to send Barnabas there to superintend the movement. He found the work so extensive and weighty that he went to Tarsus in search of Paul, "an admirable colleague", to assist him. Paul returned with him to Antioch and labored with him for a whole year (Acts 11:25-26). At the end of this period, the two were sent up to Jerusalem (AD 44) with the contributions the church at Antioch had made for the poorer members of the Jerusalem church.

Shortly after they returned, bringing John Mark with them, they were appointed as missionaries to Asia Minor, and in this capacity visited Cyprus and some of the principal cities of Pamphylia, Pisidia, and Lycaonia (Acts 13:14).

With the conversion of Sergius Paulus, Paul begins to gain prominence over Barnabas from the point where the name "Paul," his Roman name, is substituted for "Saul" (Acts 13:9); instead of "Barnabas and Saul" as heretofore (Acts 11:30; 12:25; 13:2, 7) we now read "Paul and Barnabas" (Acts 13:43, 46, 50; 14:20; 15:2, 22, 35); only in 14:14 and 15:12, 25 does Barnabas again occupy the first place, in the first passage with recollection of Acts 14:12, in the last two, because Barnabas stood in closer relation to the Jerusalem church than Paul. Paul appears as the preaching missionary (Acts 13:16; 14:8-9, 19-20), whence the Lystrans regarded him as Hermes, Barnabas as Zeus (Acts 14:12). Returning from this first missionary journey to Antioch, they were again sent up to Jerusalem to consult with the church there regarding the relation of Gentiles to the church (Acts 15:2; Galatians 2:1). According to Gal. 2:9-10, Barnabas was included with Paul in the agreement made between them, on the one hand, and James, Peter, and John, on the other, that the two former should in the future preach to the pagans, not forgetting the poor at Jerusalem. This matter having been settled, they returned again to Antioch, bringing the agreement of the council that Gentiles were to be admitted into the church.

It is quite likely, however, that the epistle of Galatians was written prior to the Jerusalem council, and that it refers to a meeting between Paul, Barnabas, and Peter, James, and John that happened earlier. Much of the scholarship of the 1800s assumes that Galatia

was a province to the north of the first missionary journey churches started through Paul and Barnabas' ministry as described in Acts 13-14. But archeology and recent scholarship accepts the fact that the province of Galatia included many of the first missionary journey churches. It would have been very strange indeed for Paul to have omitted the fact that the apostles and elders of the Jerusalem church had not laid circumcision as a requirement upon the Gentiles considering the topic of the epistle after it became a controversy in Galatia. It is more likely that the epistle was written some time before the Jerusalem council, and that teachers came from Jerusalem to Antioch teaching the need for it after Paul wrote his epistle to the Galatians, churches from the first missionary journey, addressing this issue.

After they had returned to Antioch from the Jerusalem council and after spending some time there (Acts 15:35), Paul asked Barnabas to accompany him on another journey (Acts 15:36). Barnabas wished to take John Mark along, but Paul did not, as he had left them on the former journey (Acts 15:37-38). The dispute ended by Paul and Barnabas taking separate routes. Paul took Silas as his companion, and journeyed through Syria and Cilicia; while Barnabas took John Mark to visit Cyprus (Acts 15:36-41). According to Hippolytus of Rome, John Mark is not Mark the Cousin of Barnabas, and Barnabas did not dispute with Paul because of personal favor to a blood relative, but due to his character as his nickname Barnabas ("Son of Encouragement") indicates.

Barnabas is not mentioned again by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. However, in Gal. 2:13 a little more is learned about him, that he followed Peter's example of not eating with Gentiles; and from 1 Corinthians 9:6 it may be gathered that he continued to labor as missionary. It is believed that his argument with Paul was resolved. Tradition has Barnabas preaching in Alexandria and Rome, the founder of the Cypriote Church, the Bishop of Milan (which he was not), and has him stoned to death at Salamis about the year 61.

Wikipedia

Verses 19-30

There are four important events summarized in large measure in these brief statements.

1. A Christian Church is organized among the Gentiles.
2. A new center is established for witnessing.
3. A new evangelist is called.
4. A new name is given to believers.

Barnabas becomes the most prominent actor in the following scenes. Barnabas is sent to Antioch as a result of certain Christians who had been driven from Jerusalem by the persecution which arose in connection with the death of Stephen. These Christians, who were natives of Cyprus and Cyrene, whose vision had been broadened by the teaching

of the martyr, when they reached Antioch, preached the gospel not only to Jews but also to the Gentiles. Their testimony was so great that a large multitude accepted Christ. word of this happening reached the church in Jerusalem and Barnabas was dispatched to investigate the nature of the work and to confirm the new converts. The character of this man has been revealed earlier in the narrative; he was a native of Cyprus and more likely to approve of the work done by the men of Cyprus.

Barnabas rejoiced in the work of grace which God had done in the heathen city, and he was glad to welcome the new converts as brethren in Christ. Barnabas' presence there strengthened the believers and in a great extension of the work, as Luke tells us, "he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith."

Barnabas' visit not only resulted in the rapid growth of the church, but also secured a new evangelist who became the great apostle to the Gentile world. Barnabas realized his need for help in the leadership and guidance of the church, he went to Tarsus and invited Saul to come to Antioch and assist him in the work. This was an act of unselfishness on the part of Barnabas. Barnabas must have known that he associated himself with a master mind like Saul, he himself would soon sink into a place of secondary importance, but his supreme concern was the success of the cause of Christ, and he recognized the surpassing qualifications possessed by Saul for work in the Greek city. The Lord had provided to Saul preparation for a worldwide witness, and he used the generous invitation of Barnabas as the means of starting upon his course the greatest missionary of all ages. Barnabas had accomplished a notable task for Christ and His church in that through him a great worker for the task was introduced.

That "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" is popularly attributed to the derision or ridicule of their enemies. The narrative seems to indicate that it was due to the teaching of Barnabas and Saul, but whatever the source the new name is full of significance. It centers the teaching of the apostles and the lives of the believers are founded in their sum and their center in Christ, and the church was no longer regarded as a local institution belonging to Jews and Jerusalem, but was a body of believers whose sphere of influence was the whole wide world.

Antioch was well fit for the work of universal evangelism. The city of Antioch was third in the Roman Empire, out ranked only by Rome and Alexandria. Antioch contained a mixed population, and was connected with both the East and the West by great routes of commerce and trade. Antioch was outside of Palestine and the church would be free from Jewish control and prejudices. A better base for missionary operations could not have been found. Antioch was the natural door to the Greco-Roman world, and the establishment there of a strong Gentile Christian church was a step of prime importance in the preparations providentially being made for the carrying of the gospel "unto the uttermost part of the earth."

The church at Antioch was not separate from the church in Jerusalem, both formed one body in Christ. The abiding unity of the church ever needs to be emphasized. This was recognized when Barnabas was sent to Antioch and further indicated on his return to Jerusalem. Anticipating a predicted famine the Christians of Antioch "determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders." This gift, like the community of goods practiced at Pentecost, was a spontaneous act of Christian generosity, but it showed to the believers in Jerusalem that the work of grace at Antioch was genuine and it united the Jewish and Gentile believers in the bonds of a common spiritual life. A new group of Christians had come into being, but it formed a part of the one universal church.

Key Verses

1 Corinthians 14:3, Galatians 2:1, Galatians 2:9-10, Galatians 2:13, 1 Corinthians 9:6

Chapter 12

Verses 1-25

The position, as well as the contents of this chapter should be carefully observed. This is the close of the section of Acts which tells how the church was prepared to undertake the task of evangelizing the Gentiles world. this chapter also shows the hatred felt by the Jews against the Christians, and their rejection of the gospel, so much so that if the gospel must be preached it must be preached to the Gentiles. It also show the protection of the Lord given to His witnesses as they go into all the world with His message. Herod merely undertook the prosecution of the Christians to please the Jews and the Lords divine protection appears in the deliverance of Peter and the death of Herod.

Herod Agrippa had acquired the realm of his grandfather, Herod the Great, and like him was cruel, bloodthirsty, vain, and fond of magnificent display. Herod was eager for the favor of the Jews, and so, learning their hatred for the church, he beheaded James and arrested Peter, intending to execute him shortly. This James was the apostle who was in the inner three of Peter, John, and himself. James is the one who's Mother had asked Jesus for a chief place in the Kingdom. This Jesus did not definitely refuse, but He did declare that it must be deserved, and He warned James that he must share His cup of suffering. (Matthew 20:20-21) of that cup James tasted the bitter dregs and was the first among the apostles of Christ to win the martyr's crown.

Once before Peter had escaped from prison in Jerusalem and now he is guarded with peculiar care. Sixteen soldiers are detailed, four for each watch. By supernatural power and under the guidance of an angel, Peter finds himself free to leave the prison and to

join the group of Christians who have met for prayer in the home of Mary, the mother of Mark.

God's divine intervention shows the seriousness of the crisis for the church, and how great its peril. Peter's deliverance was a clear declaration that while a civil power might persecute, and while Christians might be compelled to suffer, no government can ever destroy the Church of Christ.

In response to their prayers the Christians could hardly believe that it was Peter knocking on the gate, but thought it was a disembodied spirit. Rhoda, the servant, alone seems to have had the real faith. While the story rebukes our all too common unbelief, it may encourage us to know that God often grants gracious answers to prayers of quite imperfect faith.

Herod's execution of the guards is further proof of the reality of the miraculous deliverance of the apostle, for it shows that Peter had escaped, and it is an additional intimation of the cruelty of the king, for a fair investigation might have relieved the guards of the blame.

Herod's divine judgment against him has been declared, not for his persecution of the church, but because "he did not give God the glory." As a king he owed his position to God and was accountable to Him. (Daniel 2:20-21) Herod was abusing his God given power by condemning innocent men and in gratification of his personal vanity, was treason to the supreme Ruler. Herod is smitten with a loathsome disease and "eaten by worms." It is pitiful enough but what Christian in Jerusalem would not regard Herod's death fate as a divine retribution for his attempt to destroy the church of the living God. Barnabas and Saul were in the Holy City during this fateful days and returned to Antioch surly confident that the living Christ would protect His witnesses. Barnabas and Saul who were not preparing to evangelize the vast provinces of the Roman world.

Key Verses

Matthew 20:20-21, Daniel 2:20-21

World-Wide Witness

Chapter 13

Verses 1-12

With little notice to the world at the time Barnabas and Saul set sail from the port of Seleucia bound for Cyprus. Together they have taken the first step in a movement that has changed the course of human history and will have a vital interest in generations still yet unborn. Before they would return to join their friends in Antioch they will have traveled 1200 hundred miles. These two messengers of the church had now begun the enterprise for which the church had been commissioned by the Lord. Sixteen years had passed since the Lord had given his disciple that commission but now at last, by deliberate action, a company of Christians had set forth their representatives to carry the gospel to the Gentile world. The essential features of their mission serve today to illustrate and enforce missionary methods and principles which are valid and vital today.

In the first three verses of this chapter we see that the church at home must be spiritual, prayerful, self-denying, carefully instructed in revealed truth, and deeply concerned in the work abroad. These early Christians did not let the argument, "there are heathen enough at home" dissuade them. In Antioch there were half a million pagans when the Holy Spirit said: "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

It is evident in their selection that the chosen two were the strongest, mentally and spiritually, that could be found. True they were selected by the Holy Spirit, but the church recognized their divine call and set its seal of approval upon them by the solemn rite of ordination, and by sending them forth as representatives.

The missionaries experience in Paphos illustrates the opposition which missionaries must encounter. Barnabas and Saul may have selected Cyprus as their first field of labor because it was easily accessible by sea, on the natural trade route, and only one hundred miles distant; it was also the home of Barnabas. Further the population contained many Jews and some Christians were already there. They also voyaged to Salamis, after a brief stay crossed the island by the Roman road to Paphos, some one hundred miles to the west.

The city of Paphos was a miniature of the world which the missionaries were to attempt to evangelize. The three elements, Greek, Roman, and Jewish were all present. Paphos was the center of the licentious worship of Venus, and an example of Greek culture and moral corruption. Paphos was the home of Sergius Paulus, the governor of the province, a man of high character, and a representative of the Roman government which was to give the infant church protection. In Paphos

there was a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-Jesus. He was a type of that selfish and degenerate element of the Jews which was everywhere to oppose the work of the apostles.

Bar-Jesus tries to dissuade Sergius Paulus from the Christian faith, Saul sees in him an agent of Satan and pronounces upon him a solemn judgment by which he is smitten with blindness for a time. The result of which, the governor believes, being astonished not so much by the miracle as by the marvelous teaching concerning Christ. Messengers of the gospel should be prepared to face antagonism, but know also they are to see certain triumph.

It is here that Saul is this time forward known as Paul, in designating the apostle. Both names were always his, one Hebrew and one Roman, and the name of Paul is now used and is more acceptable to the Roman world. Paul is a Roman citizen who will move as a flaming evangel through the Roman provinces. It is also noted here that from this time forward that his association with Barnabas is now reversed. Before it was Barnabas and Saul, but now it is Paul and Barnabas. The position of leadership has now changed to the one who was to be known in coming years as “the great apostle to the Gentiles.”

The gospel message in Paphos may be confined to no class or caste in that “not many noble” may be called, but the first convert to be named in missionary history is Sergius Paulus, the Roman deputy of Cyprus.

Verses 13-52

This section of scripture sets forth the missionary message for all times and lands. Circumstances may demand minor variations but the essence is ever the same. Paul and his party have crossed the Mediterranean from Paphos to Perga. At Perga John Mark deserted and returned to Jerusalem. Climbing the steep passes of Taurus the missionaries have reached Pisidian Antioch on the high table land of Asia Minor. On the Sabbath they go to the synagogue, and, when they are invited they speak. Paul delivers his first recorded sermon. From history Paul proves that God has always provided for His chosen people, and assures the people that these gifts have culminated in Jesus, the Savior of Israel. Paul argues from the testimony of John the Baptist that Jesus is the Savior. From the rejection of Jesus which fulfilled the prediction of the prophets, and chiefly from the resurrection, which was attested by living witnesses, and which was foretold in notable passages of the Psalms. Paul’s argument is closed with an appeal to accept forgiveness of sins which this savoir can secure. Paul also warns them of unbelief with a passage taken from the Old Testament.

By Paul’s example the gospel should be presented as Jesus crucified and risen Christ as the Savior from sin, and appealing for proof to living witnesses and the inspired Word.

Paul was urged to preach again the following Sabbath and when the day arrived the Jews saw that the whole city was coming to hear him. The Jews were moved in envy, they contradicted Paul and “blasphemed.” Paul then boldly declared that he would turn his message to the Gentiles and defended his course of action by an apt quotation from Scripture. The Gentiles received his message gladly, yet not by all. Luke intends to make his readers understand that by no means will there be universal acceptance of the gospel message, either by Gentiles or Jews; only “as many as

were ordained to eternal life believed.” The Jews stirred the city against the apostles and they were compelled to flee to Iconium, but they went with joy. Opposition and persecution are the continual experiences of missionaries, but the Lord is with them, and they rejoice that sinners are being saved.

Chapter 14

Verses 1-28

There are two points of missionary strategy that the course of Paul at Iconium illustrates. First, Paul went to the larger cities and there planted churches, designing to reach the outlying districts from these chief centers of influence. Secondly, Paul moved along the line of least resistance and entered every opened door, going first to his own countrymen in their synagogues, but when finding rejection from the Jews Paul would turn to the Gentiles. At Iconium the opposition was more severe than it had been at Antioch, and here by contrast the manifestation of divine power was greater, and “signs and wonders” were done by the hands of the apostles. Often this has been the experience of Christian workers that when difficulties increase, there is a comforting revelation of the grace and mercy and goodness of God.

A plot was formed against their lives, so Paul and Barnabas fled eastward to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe. It is a proper course of action for missionaries to take in the face of danger? This can only be determined by the circumstances. At times it is best to suffer as martyrs and at other times to seek safety and continue to work after the storm has been spent.

At Lystra, Paul uses a necessary adaptation to his missionary message, but not altering the essence, but in the method of his approach. We must compare Paul’s second missionary sermon with the first. The occasion is remarkably similar to that of Peter’s second sermon. In each instance a hopelessly lame man is cured and the miracle attracts a wondering multitude. The people of Lystra are so impressed they are about to offer sacrifices to the apostles as gods. They suppose Paul to be Mercury, and Barnabas, Jupiter. Paul rebukes them not by appealing to scripture, of which the people are ignorant, but by telling them of God whose power and love are manifested in the works of nature and providence. In view of the goodness of such a living and true God, Paul calls his hearers to repentance, and prepares the way for his message concerning Christ the Savior.

Unfortunately Paul’s message has little effect. A group of jealous Jews from Iconium arrive in the scene and stir the pagans to make a common cause with them against the apostles. They stone Paul and drag him out of the city where he is left for dead. Paul’s faithful followers stand by and rejoice when they see Paul rise and return to the hostile city. The next day Paul leaves with Barnabas for Derbe, where his preaching results in the establishment of a Christian church.

Luke now gives a quick sketch of the return of the apostles, as they retrace the steps through Lystra, Iconium, Antioch, and Perga, and they sail from Attalia to report to the home church from which they have been sent. Paul pauses there and stresses an essential point to his missionary strategy, namely, the careful organization of the churches that have been formed in the field. Evangelism, as Paul performed it, did not consist in a mere, superficial, hasty heralding of the gospel, but in establishing a permanent work. Even placing himself at personal risk Paul revisited

the new converts, comforting them, instructing them, and seeing that elders were appointed for them in every church. Paul's example is the proper missionary program, which has its aim the establishment on the field of self-governing, self-sustaining, self-propagating churches. This was ever the purpose and practice of Paul.

Chapter 15

Verses 1-35

At the church in Antioch a problem arose which caused Paul to be sent to Jerusalem as a delegate to the first council of the Christian Church. It is here at Antioch that the believers were first called Christians. Antioch also had the distinction of being the first missionary church, and it became a radiating center for the evangelization of the Gentile world. Today a missionary spirit is an enviable distinction for any church.

The problem at the Antioch church was caused by their missionary involvement. Missions have a tendency to always cause problems, they are demanding of men and money and thought and prayer. Missions require the readjustment of personal plans and cooperation among men of divergent opinions. Dead churches don't have these problems. As a result of Paul's first missionary journey and the great numbers of Gentile converts, that caused so great a divergence of opinion between certain Christians of Antioch and of Jerusalem that it became necessary for Paul and Barnabas to go to the Jerusalem church to consult with the church leaders. The problem concerned the missionary message. This is the fundamental and supreme question in all modern missionary enterprise. Everyone agreed that the gospel message centered in the one word salvation. It was not interpreted as an improved social condition, but a state of the soul and a relation to God. Salvation meant deliverance from guilt, power, and presence of sin, and a life of holiness and service. All also agreed that salvation was attained by faith in Christ, but while Paul had preached on his missionary journey, that it was by faith alone, certain members of the Jerusalem church insisted that it was also necessary to keep the Law of Moses. Was Paul correct in his message? What must one do to be saved?

This difficulty did not seem too great to Paul. He was confident that he was right. On Paul's journey to Jerusalem he had great joy in announcing the salvation of Gentiles who had been converted by his message of "faith in Christ." for the minds of the converted Pharisees the difficulty was very great indeed. It was a serious problem as the scriptures seemed to be on their side of the issue. The Old Testament required and in no place abrogated the ceremonial law. These same laws the Savior Himself kept with scrupulous. Therefore, how could its obligations be omitted from the missionary message? How could this freedom for the law which Paul preached be reconciled with the scripture? Today how are we to reconcile faith and works, freedom and necessity, grace and law?

First there is a private conference of the leaders and then it was opened to discussion. Naturally Peter speaks first. Peter's argument is from the case of Cornelius and his friends, whom the advocates of the law seem to have forgotten. These people were saved without any legal observance, and even before Christian baptism. Peter further insists, the law is too heavy a yoke to bear. Who among modern Christians has ever kept the law as it was interpreted by the Master

in His Sermon on the Mount? Lastly Peter contends, we and all others must be saved wholly by grace and faith in Jesus Christ. There is no other way to salvation.

Paul speaks next. Paul gives an account of his most recent missionary journey and reports the conversion and the new life of multitudes of Gentiles who have been saved without the least knowledge of ceremonial law. This indeed was a stubborn fact. The results of missions today are the best proof of the truth of the gospel message.

James is the last speaker. James shows that the scriptures do agree with the gospel message, and had predicted that, through a Prince who was to arise in the house of David, salvation was to come to the Gentiles, who were to be saved as such without observing the Law of Moses.

The council accepted the argument of James based on three points. (1) Liberty (Acts 25:19) the Law of Moses need not be kept, and could not be a ground of salvation. (Gal 2:15-21) (2) Purity, (Acts 15:20) liberty is not license, but a life of holiness, by faith in Christ. (Gal 5:13-26) (3) Charity in matters of indifference let us not needlessly offend those who prefer to observe forms of ceremonies. (Gal 6:2)

A circular letter was sent in the name of the whole church announcing this decision, and gave great joy to the local congregations and resulted in a spirit of unity and harmony and peace. Christians unite on the acceptance of these fundamental doctrines of grace which can promise missionary success and the wide proclamation of a true gospel message.

Verses 36-41

Paul's second missionary journey resulted in the establishment of Christian churches on the continent of Europe. These churches became centers for evangelistic work, and included in their influence the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth.

The story opens with a painful incident, the separation of Paul and Barnabas. They fell into a dispute over whether to take John Mark with them. On the former journey John Mark had deserted them at Perga. It is certain that John Mark was at fault, but the question was as to whether he should be forgiven and granted another trial. Barnabas' view was more lenient, who was cousin to Mark and a man of gentle and sympathetic disposition. Paul had more zeal for the work which he felt should not be imperiled out of regard for individual feeling and preferences. Because of this controversy the two apostles decided to part company.

A serious problem for modern missions, in fact for all Christian enterprises, is that of the personal relationships of the workers. There are times that it is necessary to agree to disagree, as often serious differences are as truly forgiven and forgotten as was the case, in later years, with Paul and Barnabas and Mark.

It is a regrettable incident and must have been distressing to the devoted friends whose lives had been so long intertwined, but it was over ruled for the greater work of spreading the gospel message. Barnabas took Mark and they sailed to Cyprus, while Paul chose Silas and started overland for Cilicia.

Timothy

Timothy, ("honoring God") or ("honored by God") was a first-century Christian bishop who died around the year 97 AD. The New Testament indicates that Timothy traveled with Paul, who was also his mentor. He is addressed as the recipient of the Epistles to Timothy.

Timothy is mentioned in the Bible at the time of Paul's second visit to Lystra in Anatolia, where Timothy is mentioned as a "disciple". Paul calls Timothy his "own son in the faith". Timothy often traveled with Paul. Timothy's mother was Jewish and his father was Greek, but he had not been circumcised, and Paul now ensured that this was done, according to the text, to ensure Timothy's acceptability to the Jews. According to McGarvey Paul performed the operation "with his own hand", but others claim this is unlikely and nowhere attested. He was ordained and went with Paul on his journeys through Phrygia, Galatia, Mysia, Troas, Philippi, Veria, and Corinth. His mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois, are noted as eminent for their piety and faith, which indicates that they may have also been Christians. Timothy is praised by Paul for his knowledge of the Scriptures, and is said to have been acquainted with the Scriptures since childhood.

Timothy was jailed at least once during the period of the writing of the New Testament is implied by the writer of Hebrews mentioning Timothy's release at the end of the epistle. It is also apparent that Timothy had some type of stomach malady, owing to Paul's advice in 1Timothy 5:23, counseling Timothy to "No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments."

Paul commanded Timothy to remain in Ephesus (1Timothy 1:2) "I command you to stay there in Ephesus" to prevent heresy from infecting the church in Ephesus. Paul also gave Timothy instructions for establishing Elders and Deacons there. These very guidelines have become the commonly used guidelines among churches across the world to this day. According to later tradition, Paul consecrated Timothy as bishop of Ephesus in the year 65, where he served for 15 years. In the year 97, with Timothy dying at age 80, Timothy tried to halt a pagan procession of idols, ceremonies, and songs. In response to his preaching of the gospel, the angry pagans beat him, dragged him through the streets, and stoned him to death. In the 4th century, his relics were transferred to the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople. From Wikipedia

Chapter 16

Verses 1-5

The successor to Mark as Paul's assistant was Timothy. Timothy was somewhat timid, different, and emotional, but affectionate, sincere, and devoted. Timothy became Paul's closet friend and was a constant companion, and to the apostle as a beloved child. Paul discovered his new assistant as he revisited the cities of Lystra and Derbe. Timothy was well instructed in the scriptures by his Jewish mother and grandmother, his father was a Gentile and the Mosaic Law had not been observed in the home. Paul had Timothy circumcised in order to avoid offence to the Jews whom Paul was to work. Timothy was then ordained by the presbytery, and started with Paul upon the memorable journey which brought the evangelist to Europe. The story of Paul and Timothy is a beautiful story of friendship and companionship in Christian service and work on foreign fields.

Verses 6-40

Paul's original purpose was to visit churches previously established, but his privilege and duty was unexpectedly widened. After –passing through Phrygia and Catalina, Paul was providentially hindered from going to BIRTHYIA, and so he moved westward until he reached Troas and was stopped by the sea. It has been well said that “the stops as well as the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.” Then came the vision in the night: "A man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us." When one seeks guidance and ready to obey, even a comparatively insignificant sign may be sufficient to indicate his course. "When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them."

Beginning here we see a change in the text. For the first time the author uses the words “we” and “us” as the author is writing as an eye witness. It is here that Luke, the beloved physician, now joins the party, worthy leader of that loyal host of medical missionaries who have been among the pioneers to carry relief to suffering bodies and needy souls beyond the seas.

The voyage to Europe took only a few days. The travelers landed at Newpolis and crossed the mountains to Phillipi, ten miles distant. Nearly a century before, the empire of the world had been determined when Augustus and Antony defeated Brutus and Cassius. The city of Phillipi was a military colony, a miniature Rome, and in the persons who their met the apostles are mirrored the moral and spiritual needs of the ancient and modern world.

The first convert to be made in Phillipi, and the first in Europe, was Lydia. Lydia was a woman of wealth, of intelligence, of wide experience, a seller of purple cloth, who had come from the city of Thyatira. Lydia was religious, godly, and prayerful. Yet this woman needed salvation, she needed Christ. Lydia was with a group of women in prayer on the Sabbath when Paul found her. The Lord opened her heart to believe the gospel message; she was baptized, and received the apostles as guest in her hospitable home. The character of Lydia reminds the reader of the Ethiopian eunuch, of Saul of Tarsus, of Cornelius the centurion, all were good upright, godly, yet they needed the salvation which comes from intelligent faith in the crucified, risen, divine Christ. If Lydia suggest the need of what the gospel message can bring, so to her generous actions which followed by opening her home to the apostles. Lydia represents the invaluable support women given to the cause of Christian missions throughout the centuries. Lydia is not the common woman found in heathen lands, as their condition is pictured by the poor slave girl, who was possessed by an evil spirit, and by whom her masters were making a profit from. Many a woman today is enslaved by men for profit. Their nameless agonies and anguish are the real cry “Macedonian cry” which the church of Christian lands should heed. Their distress is not only their outward circumstance but also the need to cast out the evil that works within their hearts. Paul, who had become disturbed by her cries, finally spoke his memorable words: "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out at that very moment." Not all women are like Lydia and not all are like the slave girl, but millions are waiting for the messengers who can speak with confident faith as Paul in the omnipotent name of Christ.

The men today who acquire their wealth by the degradation of womanhood would find themselves much as the masters of this poor slave girl. They saw Paul as an intrusion into their sinful livelihood

and resented Paul's power over the slave girl's evil spirit. They succeeded in having the apostles beaten and imprisoned on a false charge without a legal trial.

Bleeding and bruised, and now confined to an inner dungeon, the evangelist were undaunted and sang songs through the night, until God shook the prison and the messengers were sent free. All who oppose organized vice can expect bitter opposition, but being on the side of Christ is being on the side of omnipotence, and there is no need of despair.

An earthquake which opened the gates of the prison, the false charges against the apostles, the gospel message which they spoke, the jailers own fear and sense of need, resulted in his conversion. The jailer is a type of the debased, depressed, degraded manhood which always needs the gospel. We see that not all men are like Saul and Cornelius. The jailer's ready acceptance of the message, his subsequent conduct, and his immediate confession of faith, all illustrate how clearly he understood the answer which Paul gave to his eager question as to the way of salvation: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." Surely this is the message for all men of every class and condition.

In the morning the magistrates, moved no doubt by what had been reported to them, sent word to release Paul and Silas, but Paul insisted upon public vindication and still further terrified the rulers by the announcement that he was a Roman citizen. The magistrate's treatment of the apostles had been a serious offence. Paul's point was made complete. He was willing to suffer for the sake of Christ, but wanted the civil governors to realize that persecuting men for their Christian faith they offended against the laws of both men and God.

Chapter 17

Verses 1-15

The apostles traveled to Thessalonica and then to Berea, a distance of about one hundred fifty miles. Their stay in Thessalonica intimates how the gospel should be preached, and their experience in Berea shows how it should be received.

Thessalonica, now known as Saloniki, was a city of considerable size and influence. The cities greatest fame comes from the apostle Paul who founded a church there and the two short letters he wrote to that church. A reference to these letters certainly shows that Paul remained their longer than the "three Sabbath days" to which Luke refers. This earlier period Paul devoted to working with the Jews in the synagogue, but several weeks or more were spent in securing the Gentile converts of which the church chiefly composes. Both Acts and Paul's Epistles lay great stress upon the content on the message delivered by Paul. The Exposition of scripture is essentially the most valuable from of preaching then and today. Paul's one theme is Jesus Christ, whom he proved to be the Savior, the promised Messiah, and who, as the Old Testament declared, must necessarily have suffered for sin and risen from the dead. The Epistles show further the great stress laid upon the second coming of Christ as the glorious King.

The Kingship of Christ is the doctrine that the enemies of Paul laid hold of, as they aroused a mob in the city and attempted to seize the apostle. Not finding Paul in the home of Jason, they dragged

Jason out and took him to the rulers of the city. They charged Jason of harboring men guilty of treason, men who said that, "there is another king, Jesus." The magistrates acted fairly and released Jason on bail to await trial.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy made their escape by night and moved on to Berea. In Berea the Jews showed they "were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." The Jews in Berea were idea hearers, and the contrast is striking in comparison to the Jews in Thessalonica, whose blind prejudice prevented them from fairly weighing the evidence for the teachings proclaimed. In their envy the Jews of Thessalonica followed the apostles to Berea. The success the apostles had in Berea enraged them and they aroused the people and compelled Paul to continue his flight. Silas and Timothy remained behind. Luke also seems to have remained at Phillipi, but Paul took sail for three hundred miles south to Athens.

Verses 16-34

The intellectual and religious center of the ancient world was Athens, it was the seat of all the prevailing schools of philosophy, and every religion is determined by certain essential underlying, philosophic conceptions as to God, man, the world, mind, and matter. In this story are represented all the elements which constitute the so-called "religions" of the modern world, and it suggest how these are to be approached and how they can be met by the followers of Christ.

First of all there was the worship of idols, an image in which a spirit was supposed to reside. What stirred Paul was not the beauty of the statues and shrines, the altars and temples, but what these works of art were known to represent. "His spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols." It has been commonly said that there are more gods in Athens than men. The ignorance and superstition and vice and immorality by which idolatry is inevitably accompanied is what moved Paul.

Our own modern world is completely full of idols. It is appalling how large a portion of men today are bowing before gods which men have made. Even the majority of those who theoretically adhere to some one of the ethnic faiths are practically fetish worshipers, even the countless "Christians" worship images, and others displace God by some other object of real devotion and affection.

Paul encountered the Jews in both the places of worship and in places of public resort. Orthodox Judaism can be found in every region of the modern world, and practical Judaism is represented by millions who trust and worship one living and true God, but who deny the deity, the resurrection, and the atoning work of Jesus Christ.

Paul met representatives of two schools of thought whose tenets mold the beliefs of many modern religious systems and cults. The "Epicureans" were practically materialists and atheists. They taught that the real aim of existence is pleasure; that pleasure is the only good, and pain is the only evil. They believe that virtue is to be sought only because it yields the most enjoyment, and that man should free himself for all belief in gods or the immortality of the soul. They believe that the universe was not created but resulted from a chance concourse of atoms. They believe that since

there is no future life then there is no judgment, therefore, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.

Also Paul encountered the “Stoics.” While they had admirable qualities their belief was in substance, the same as modern “pantheism.” For them God was everything and everything was God. God was the soul of the universe, but not distinct from it. They believed that the difference between sin and virtue, and the distinction between the human and the divine, ceased to exist. They taught men resignation and the conquest of circumstances, but they were fatalist and considered absolute apathy the highest moral attainment. It would be illuminating to learn how far Hinduism is pantheistic, how far Mohammedanism is fatalistic, and how certain popular “fads” of America and England practically deny the personality of God, and identify the human and the divine.

The simplest Christian truths are absurd to such philosophers. To them Paul was regarded as a babbling man, a man who had small scraps of truths that could not be brought into any world system. By sheer curiosity, and supreme contempt, they allowed Paul to address them.

After complimenting the Greeks on the fact they were very religious Paul continues his address and builds an illustration on an altar dedicated "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD." Playing upon the meaning of this dedication Paul insists that, with all their wisdom and religion they do not know the true God. Paul proceeds to say that false views of God are the essential error of all the present world religions. A right view of God is absolutely essential to the Christian faith. It is useless to attempt to reconcile the gospel with pantheism or materialism or naturalism.

Speaking of God's relation to the world and men, Paul states that God is the creator and the moral governor of all, truths that strike at the very heart of materialism, of pantheism, of polytheism, of atheism, of fetishism, and of idolatry. Paul teaches that man is the offspring of God, of one blood, accountable to God and under His providential care. This fact Paul establishes by quoting from one of the Greek poets, either Aratus or Cleanthes. Paul treats sin as an offence to a personal judge who now demands repentance in view of the new revelation which he has made for the guidance of man. As to the way of salvation, it is through Christ who is the appointed Judge whose real nature is proved by the fact of His resurrection from the dead. Luke has given us only an outline of Paul's matchless message, even this fragment contains a definite reference to every essential part of the Christian faith. We should carefully consider Paul's argument as we consider ours against the world religions that we would be prepared to meet them with courtesy and power in presenting the truth as it is in Christ.

Paul has been criticized for being too philosophic in his argument, but one of the judges was converted, also a woman of prominence, "and others with them." If there was any failure it must be attributed to the intellectual pride of his hearers.

Chapter 18

Verses 1-22

Paul experienced a crisis in his life when he went to Corinth. The causes of this discouragement were those common to Christians, particularly to workers on the foreign field. It may be helpful to enumerate these, and also the divine providences by which he was given relief.

First of all, loneliness was felt by Paul, he waited eagerly for the arrival of Silas and Timothy, but in the meantime this great heathen city he found no friend to whom he could go for companionship and sympathy. Often missionaries in the field feel weighted down in the midst of heathenism and have a sense of isolation and separation from friends.

Paul was also embarrassed by a lack of funds, and was compelled to resort to his trade as a tentmaker to secure his livelihood. Paul was not an artisan; he usually was a traveler, preacher, scholar, supported by family and friends. Paul was not ashamed to work with his hands; still, financial need is always depressing, and particularly when one sees that his Christian work is suffering for lack of more liberal support.

The Jews were especially antagonizing and bitter; "they resisted and blasphemed," these were his own countrymen, who he dearly loved, for whom he would have given his life, and from whom he might have expected sympathy and support. So often Christian workers find no encouragement in the home court, many missionaries find their greatest obstacle in the lives of nominal Christians on the home field.

The chief cause of depression may have been the character of the city that Paul was attempting to work in. Corinth was the capitol of the province of Achaia, rich, prosperous, intellectual, but its moral corruption was as deep and universal as to be proverbial throughout the Roman world that it shook even the pagan sense of decency. Commercialism and materialism were absolutely absorbing, and the intellectual pride was almost invincible. Are Christian workers never disheartened by prevailing conditions? Do missionaries never feel depressed by the dead weight of heathen corruption and moral degradation?

Paul did form new friendships with Aquila and Priscilla, who held a large place in his life. Old friends are the best but new ones must be found or the circle will grow distressingly small. Paul's preaching on the Sabbath was a source of satisfaction to the apostles, however lonely one may be, there is always a deep joy in testifying for Christ.

From Macedonia Silas and Timothy arrived and along with them the encouragement which comes from reunion with precious friends. The supreme cause of relief, however, was found in a new vision of Christ. "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city." Paul was now assured of the presence, the power, and the saving purpose of his Lord. With renewed strength Paul founded a new strong Christian church in Corinth. It was from the church in Corinth that Paul wrote encouraging letters to the church in Thessalonica. In exchange for Paul's discouragement he became the beneficiary of glorious victory.

Shortly Paul was given an example of the protection promised him by the Lord. This incident has been interpreted in two quite opposite ways. The Jews placed Paul before Gallio, the newly appointed governor of Achaia, hoping to have the apostle expelled from the city. Gallio refused to entertain their charge, which specified no crime or misdemeanor, but involved merely a question of Jewish law, and he drove the Jews from his judgment seat. The Greeks gladly seized the opportunity to administer a beating to Sosthenes, the leader of the Jewish mob. For the Gentiles this is an amusing form of entertainment. "Gallio was not concerned about any of these things," Gallio was indifferent to religion matters.

In a few short strokes Luke now traces the course of Paul as he completed his work in Corinth, and journeyed by way of Ephesus to Caesarea and Jerusalem and Antioch. There are two significant links in this narrative. The vow taken by Paul and his eagerness to celebrate "the feast" in Jerusalem indicate how truly he could claim ever to have observed the traditions of the Jews.

Paul made a favorable impression in the city of Ephesus and placed Priscilla and Aquila there. By doing this Paul prepared the way for the long stay made in that important city when on his third missionary journey.

Verses 23-28

On Paul's third missionary journey he stayed in Ephesus for nearly three years. The record of this timely stay is introduced by the mention of two incidents which occurred, one before and the other after his arrival. Both prepare the reader for the account of the fruitful service of the three years by emphasizing anew the full gospel which Paul proclaimed and the presence of the Holy Spirit by whose power the work was done.

There are many good, gifted, eloquent, earnest men who know or declare only "the baptism of John." They call men to repent of sins, they insist on social justice and public integrity, and they emphasize the teachings and example of Jesus, but they are silent as to the absolute necessity of a new birth by the power of the Holy Spirit. Ethics and social reform are absolutely essential parts of the gospel message, but they must not supplant and can only follow the proclamation of a living and divine Christ, through faith in whom alone men can receive in all fullness the gift of His Spirit.

Apollos

Apollos was a Jew from Alexandria. This led to speculations that Apollos preached in the allegorical style of Philo. Theologian Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, for example, recently commented: "It is difficult to imagine that an Alexandrian Jew could have escaped the influence of Philo, the great intellectual leader particularly since the latter seems to have been especially concerned with education and preaching."

Apollos is first mentioned as a Christian preacher who had come to Ephesus (probably in the year 52/3), where he is described as "being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John." (Acts 18:24-25) Priscilla and Aquila, a Jewish Christian couple who had come to Ephesus with the Apostle Paul, instructed Apollos.

"When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more adequately."(Acts 18:26) The differences between the two and Apollos probably included baptism and the Holy Spirit, for Acts says that Apollos "knew only the baptism of John" (Acts 18:25) and later, during Apollo's absence, recounts an encounter between Paul and some disciples at Ephesus:

“And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. (Acts 19:2-6)”

Before Paul's arrival, Apollos had moved from Ephesus to Achaia (Acts 18:27) and is located at Corinth, the provincial capital of Achaia. (Acts 19:1) Acts reports that Apollos arrived in Achaia with letters of recommendation from Ephesian Christians and "greatly helped those who through grace had believed, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus. (Acts 18:27-28)

Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (55 AD) mentions Apollos as an important figure at Corinth. Paul described Apollos' role at Corinth: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth."(1Cor 3:6) Paul's Epistle refers to a schism between four parties in the Corinthian church, of which two attached themselves to Paul and Apollos respectively, using their names (the third and fourth were Peter, identified as Cephas, and Jesus Christ himself). (1Cor 1:10-13) There is no indication that Apollos favored or approved an overestimation of his person. Paul urged him to go to Corinth at the time, but Apollos refused, stating that he would come later when he had an opportunity. (1Cor 16:12)

Apollos is mentioned one more time in the New Testament. In the Epistle to Titus, the recipient is exhorted to "speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way". (Titus 3:13) From Wikipedia

First we are introduced to Apollos, one of the great characters of the church. Born in Alexandria, the center of the broadest culture of the day, he was a man of great eloquence and fervor, a Jew who was carefully in the Old Testament scriptures, a believer in Jesus who knew of His life and teachings. Apollos was a disciple of John the Baptist and was ignorant of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, and of the Pentecost gift of the Holy Spirit.

The two disciples left in Ephesus by Paul, Priscilla and Aquila probably had a leading part in teaching Apollos the truth about the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Ephesian Christians provided letters of commendation from the Ephesian church for Apollos to go to Corinth. In Corinth Apollos became a mighty power in proclaiming the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Chapter 19

Verses 1-7

Apollos' story prepares us for the strange experience which awaited Paul on his arrival in Ephesus. Paul encounters twelve disciples of John the Baptist. Paul was bewildered because none of them had the gifts of the Spirit. Paul inquired if they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed; for our course every Christian believer has the unfailing presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Their reply was that they knew nothing of such a gift of the Spirit. Paul asked who they were and who could they be? They answered that they were followers of John the Baptist. It was then that Paul understood their defect and he told them about Jesus, of His death and resurrection and present power. When these followers heard about Jesus they believed in Jesus, they were baptized in His name and were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they were granted the gifts of tongues and prophecy.

There are men like Apollos in Christian pulpits but there are many more like these twelve disciples in the pews of Christian churches. Men, who are sincere, hate their sins, believe in the teachings of Jesus, admire the Sermon on the Mount, yearn for the highest and best things, but they lack spiritual power. Why? Because they are disciples of John, they have not fixed their hearts and their hopes upon a divine, risen, glorified Christ; they do not know the grace of God. When they learn the full gospel truth and yield themselves to Christ, they are not merely baptized with water, but also by the Holy Spirit.

Verses 8-41

When the twelve received the Holy Spirit it has sometimes been called the "Ephesian Pentecost." Possibly that term might also be applied to the further experience of Paul in that great heathen city. As in the story of Pentecost, it is not only a narrative of the gift of tongues, but of bold testimony, of multitudes converted, of lives transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are given few details but Luke summarizes the events of three years in a few brief paragraphs.

Paul, as usual, preached to the Jews first and then turned to the Gentiles, using as his auditorium a schoolroom of Tyrannus. As a result of Paul's testimony the whole province of Asia was evangelized. Paul's preaching was impressive by the extraordinary miracles which he worked in the name of Jesus. When traveling exorcists attempted to use this sacred name to expel a demon, the possessed man leaped on them and drove them from the house "naked and wounded." News of this traveled throughout the city and the results were startling: great "fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified." Many believers confessed their sins, most significant of all, those who practiced magic arts acknowledged their fraud, and made a bonfire of parchments on which their incantations and formulas were written and so sacrificed what would have amounted in value to more than eight thousand dollars.

The successes of Ephesus filled Paul with an eager desire for even wider fields of labor and he lifted his sights towards Rome. First it was necessary for Paul to revisit the churches established on his former missionary journeys, and to take from them a contribution to the poor saints in Jerusalem. From here forward the story in Acts is chiefly concerned with the steps of Paul that brought him providentially to the imperial city, the capitol of the world.

There is one more incident here at the close of the experiences in Ephesus. It is dramatic, even ludicrous in some respects, but it forms a climax to the story of Paul's success, for it shows how the forces of the enemy were terrified, baffled, defeated.

Demetrius, a silversmith, a man of evident influence in the city, summons his fellow craftsmen and reminds them that so many people are turning from idol worship that the sale of images and of models of the great temple of Dianna has almost ceased. Like many other men in similar circumstances Demetrius, while hiding his covetousness in a veil of deceit beneath a show of great religious zeal and of love for their goddess. He quickly aroused a mob and the whole city is stirred. Two of Paul's companions are seized and the crowds surge to the public theater. Paul is prevented by his friends from venturing near, where he certainly would have been killed. A Jew named Alexander, is put forward to deliver an address, possibly that the Jews were not at fault, the mob shows its real temper, its unwillingness to listen to any defense, and for two hours the people rend the air with the mad cry: "Great is Dianna of the Ephesians." The crisis brings the town clerk forward with a speech of amusing shrewdness and force. The clerk tells the crowd that they are shouting to prove a fact which no one had denied. He further insists that Paul and his companions have been guilty of no crime, and that if Demetrius and his friends have any grievance the law courts are open and there, not at the hands of a mob, justice will be administered. Lastly he reminds the people that such disorders endanger the liberties allowed to the city by Rome, and that someone will be called to account before the imperial government for such a riotous assembly. His wise words prevail, and the speaker dismisses the mob.

Chapter 20

Verses 1-16

Luke sketches the journey of Paul to Macedonia and Achaia. The second Epistle to the Corinthians throws a clear light upon the purpose of the apostle and upon the trials through which he was passing. While in route to Greece from Macedonia Paul wrote this second Epistle. While Paul was in Ephesus he writes a letter to the Galatians and at least one to the Christians at Corinth. Once reaching Corinth Paul wrote his famous letter to the believers in Rome. It was towards Rome Paul's heart was constantly yearning. Luke seems almost impatient to bring his readers to Jerusalem and to the events which enabled the apostle too finally realize his hopes. One touch here given is significant, Luke mentions a plot of the Jews which prevented Paul from making the rapid sea voyage to Syria and compelled him tediously to retrace his steps through Macedonia. The malice by the Jews was continually appearing, awaits the apostle in Jerusalem. It becomes an instrument in the hands of providence to bring the apostle as a witness for Christ to Caesar's palace.

Paul started northward through Macedonia and it is evident that, in addition to the traveling companions already named, Luke joined the company. Now the compressed narrative becomes a story of a minute incident, it is written in the first person and is evidently the work of an eyewitness. Between Philippi and Miletus the one important event is in connection with the stay of Paul at Troas. Paul stayed a week there, and there he preformed his most notable miracle. Paul was celebrating the Lord's Super with his disciples, and to speak to them words of cheer. Eutychus fell from the window and was killed, but Paul restored him to life. The presence of such divine power

was comforting to the believers, and undoubtedly encouraging to Paul as he moved rapidly forward to meet the supreme trials of his life.

Verses 17-38

Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian Elders reveals the heart of the apostle, his tenderness, his sympathy, his affection, and his tears. Paul's address is filled with practical advice for Christian ministers and missionaries. His address is filled with guidance and inspiration that is such an aid to every follower of Christ in the conduct of life and in the fulfillment of duty. Paul's journey to Jerusalem did not allow time for his visit to Ephesus and so he had summoned the elders of the church to meet him at Miletus, thirty-six miles from Ephesus where he had spent three years with notable success. Paul's purpose was not only to enjoy the company of friends who had become dear to him as fellow workers, but chiefly to encourage them to be faithful in their care of the church which he was leaving to their care and guidance. It was a tearful meeting as Paul had a sense that he would not see these friends again.

As Paul looks back (Acts 20:19-21) he reminds them of his "lowliness of mind," his patience under trials, and his faithfulness shown in teaching the whole gospel to all classes and in all places, public and private. The essence of that gospel message consisted in "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul declares that it is his duty to press on to Jerusalem, although he is aware of the bonds and afflictions which await him there. "I hold not my life of any account as dear unto myself, so that I may accomplish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

Paul exhorts the elders to be as faithful in their care of the flock as he has been. It is their sacred trust, as the church has been purchased by the blood of Christ. Vigilance will be necessary, as false teachers are certain to attack the church, like "grievous wolves." Their trust in God and dependence upon His gracious word will build the elders up and give them an inheritance among the saints.

Lastly, Paul appeals to the supreme motive of unselfish love, and uses the example of his own life in Ephesus, where he labored with his own hands to support himself in order to continue the proclamation of the gospel. This sacrificial service is supported by the words of our Lord and nowhere else recorded, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Chapter 21

Verses 1-16

Paul leaving Miletus passes on to Tyre, Ptolemais, and onto Jerusalem. This brief passage presents two facts which prepare us for the closing scenes of Acts. First, the deep affection Paul's friends held for him, and secondly, Paul faces with matchless courage the trials which are so certain and so near. In both places, Tyre and Caesarea, loving friends would detain him or turn him back from the path of duty. Paul displays his heroic bravery which bears him forward to pain and suffering, to bonds and imprisonment.

The disciples of Tyre “said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not set foot in Jerusalem.” Some say that Paul disobeyed the Spirit, and in stubborn self will pushed on to the place of needless peril and suffered the loss of liberty. The real meaning of the historian is made quite clear when a similar experience, which came to Paul in Caesarea, is narrated more in detail. There, while Paul is entertained in the home of “Phillip the evangelist,” a prophet, Agabus, arrives from Judea, and by a striking symbol predicts Paul’s approaching imprisonment. “He took Paul’s belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, “Thus says the Holy Spirit, ‘This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.’” When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem.” This is what had occurred at Tyre, that is, Paul had been assured of his peril, and affectionate friends had attempted to dissuade him from his purpose. This purpose, however, was formed under the guidance of the Spirit. It was the will of the Lord, as Paul well knew. For years Paul had been planning to bring to Jerusalem the collection for the saints from the missionary churches of the west. It was Paul’s courage, not self-confidence, which led him to reply: “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” Agabus did not rebuke the apostle, but united with Luke and the other disciples in saying: “Let the will of the Lord be done.”

The will of the Lord led Paul through Jerusalem to Rome. Paul purposed that the Jews in their national capitol should have the opportunity of hearing the gospel from one who loved their nation, who had come bearing gifts expressive of his devotion, one who would speak before the chief council and give to the nation a final opportunity of accepting Jesus as the Messiah. It was the rejection of the message brought by Paul, which sealed the fate of the nation and resulted in sending the gospel to Rome and the Gentile world.

Verses 17-36

The remaining portion of Acts is concerned with the experiences of Paul as a prisoner in the hands of the Roman authorities. From the time of Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem to his release in Rome is about five years. Paul was arrested while he was trying to remove a certain prejudice against him felt by the members of the church in Jerusalem. The Christian leaders had welcomed Paul with rejoicing over his success among the Gentiles. These leaders knew that the many members of the church in Jerusalem, which we all converted Jews, believed the false reports that Paul had not only admitted Gentiles to the church, but had compelled Jews who accepted Christ to give up their national customs and forsake the Law of Moses. In an effort to disprove these false reports, to bring perfect unity to the church, even to conciliate the mad hatred of the unbelieving Jews, Paul was advised to take the Nazirite vow and to observe its exacting ritual. Paul accepted this advice. The ceremonials connected with this vow were quite elaborate and expensive; Paul also agreed to defray the cost for four poorer members of the local church. In this Paul gave a public and certain proof that he was loyal to the Jewish race and its customs.

This action of Paul has caused severe criticism, which has been termed compromising and hypocritical; it has also been regarded as the unnecessary cause of his arrest. This view is to miss the point of the story and misunderstand the principles of Paul. Paul had rejected the Law as a means of justification, not as a mode of life. Paul did not trust the Law of Moses or its observance

as a means for his salvation. Paul did practice its ceremonies as one who loved his nation and who was glad to avoid any needless offence to his fellow countrymen.

Paul's arrest was not due to his observance of the Law, but to the wholly false charges against him that he had violated the Law. The Jews from Asia raised a tumult by seizing Paul, gathering a crowd, and crying out that he had defiled the Temple by bringing Gentiles within its courts. This charge was wholly untrue. Paul was a victim of malicious falsehood, and the real intention of the author, the true force of the narrative, is not to suggest any fault on the part of the apostle, but to emphasize the guilt of the Jews. These Jews were trying to have Paul put to death as an apostate and a blasphemer, yet they seized him at the very time and place where he was showing his intense love for the Temple and his loyalty to Jewish law and customs.

This circumstance proves that his enemies were moved by malice and envy, that their real enmity was against Christ, and that their violence to Paul was actually another rejection of the gospel.

The frenzied mob in the Temple seized and beat the apostle. Paul was rescued by the Roman soldiers who were stationed in the neighboring castle of Antonia. The Roman soldiers were charged with the preservation of order in the city, there is given a picture typical of the experiences of Paul during the next five years or more. Paul becomes a prisoner unjustly confined, but protected by the Roman officers from the murderous hatred of the Jews.

These experiences are symbolized by the scene drawn by Luke: Then the commander came up and took hold of him, and ordered him to be bound with two chains; and he began asking who he was and what he had done. But among the crowd some were shouting one thing and some another, and when he could not find out the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. When he got to the stairs, he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob; for the multitude of the people kept following them, shouting, "Away with him!" The commander by whom Paul was being arrested was greatly mistaken as to the character of his prisoner. He supposed Paul to be a notorious Egyptian outlaw, imposter, and desperado, who sometime before had led an insurrection and had escaped when defeated. The commander was surprised when Paul addressed him in Greek. The commander was even more surprised to learn that Paul was a citizen of Tarsus, a city which had been shown high favor by the Roman Government. For these reasons he was ready to grant Paul's request for the privilege of addressing the people, and the more so because he was moved by the hope that such an address might give information which would be useful to himself.

Chapter 22

Verses 1-22

At first what Paul delivers seems to be a recital of his own conversion, a story that Luke has already made us familiar, looking closer the address shows that it is a skillful argument, so arranged as to prove that the course of Paul has been divinely ordered and thus to imply that those who oppose Paul are, in reality, placing themselves in opposition to God. There are three steps to Paul's reasoning.

1. By Paul's birth, education, and earlier experience has been in perfect agreement with his supernatural influence which has come into his life.
2. Paul was transformed by a divine power from a persecutor to an apostle by a vision of Jesus on his way to Damascus, a living and glorified Jesus, and further by a miracle brought upon him by a devout Jew named Ananias. At the hands of Ananias Paul received his lost sight, and before whom he confessed his faith which secured the forgiveness of his sins. Here Paul forcefully hears that Jesus of Nazareth is the true Savior, and that to persecute His followers is a grievous sin.
3. Paul states that his divine purpose is in relation to the Gentiles, his work among them, and his message to them. Paul continues that he has been occasioned by the unwillingness of the Jews to receive him, who, because of his previous course as a fanatical defender of the Jewish Law, as he now testifies to the truth of beliefs he once so rejected and hated. This last statement raises two questions. Will these Jews now act as did their fellow citizens of twenty years before? Will they reject the gospel, and if so can Paul be blamed if he turns again to preach the gospel to the Gentiles?

Paul is a Jew, educated in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel, he has been so zealous for the Law that he formerly persecuted all who accepted Jesus as the Way and was known to live as His followers. Now if Paul differs from other Jews reminds him it must be because of some

These questions may have begun to press upon the minds of the hearers, but the very word "Gentiles" is too hateful for them to endure. "They listened to him up to this statement, and then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!" It is a fateful hour for the Jews, by rejecting Paul; the people are again rejecting Christ.

Verses 23-30

The mob of angry Jews were not persuaded by Paul's defense, neither did it shed any light for the Roman commander. He could not follow its arguments, as it gave no clue to the crime which the Jews implied that Paul was guilty of. In order to get the facts from the apostle the commander decided to have Paul examined by torture. Paul was bound and about to be scourged when Paul disclosed the fact that he was a Roman citizen. It was not legal to bind a Roman citizen without a trial, much less to have him scourged. This revelation terrified the commander and his lieutenants and Paul was at once treated with courtesy.

Chapter 23

Verses 1-11

Unable to learn why the Jews were so enraged by Paul, the commander determined to place him on trial before the supreme Jewish council, the Sanhedrin. The following morning the council was summoned and Paul was arraigned before them. The Roman commander had no idea that on that day, not the apostle, but his judges were to be tried and condemned. Christ was again to be presented to the nation. Again Christ was rejected and the doom of the nation was sealed.

There are two questions proposed by the conduct of Paul before the Sanhedrin. First, was Paul moved by anger when he rebuked the High Priest? Secondly, was Paul attempting a shrewd subterfuge when he proposed the question of the resurrection?

To the first question it is best to conclude that Paul did not perceive that the speaker who commanded that he be smitten on the mouth was the High Priest. Paul's reply was not an angry imprecation, as it was a solemn warning of prophecy. In opposition to the spirit and demands of the Law of Moses these judges, in their pretended zeal for the Law, was really acting contrary to the Law. Once Paul learned the rank of the speaker, his reply was courteous and he implied that he would not willingly be guilty of even an apparent breach of the courtesy due to one occupying a sacred office.

Paul showed his true insight in declaring that the whole question of his guilt or innocence was involved in the acceptance or rejection of the doctrine of the resurrection. The real charge against Paul was not that he was not loyal to Jewish Law or Jewish beliefs; the real charge was that he preached the resurrection, and declared that the resurrection of Jesus is the proof that He is the Messiah. It was then the question of the resurrection that was before the council. Paul knew the judges were divided on this issue of the resurrection, he knew the real unbelief of the Sadducees, and he must have felt a secret satisfaction in having them rebuked by their fellow judges for attempting to convict a man of renouncing the Law which they so openly rejected. Paul had declared before the council the essential doctrine of the Christian faith, for which he was on trial.

Paul's declaration produced a tumult in the court. The Sadducees would have torn Paul to pieces and the Pharisees would have protected him from violence, as they admitted that he was guilty of no crime and at most was only the victim of some hallucination, if not the recipient of some divine message. Even so they would have killed Paul if the Roman commander had not rescued him and carried him away to the castle.

That night a new vision from the Lord comforted Paul. There was divine approval of Paul's course and a new assurance of supernatural aid and protection. Paul was promised that the wish of his life was to be realized. Paul was to testify for Christ in Rome.

Verses 12-35

Forty Jews bound themselves together by an oath to kill Paul. These forty went to the chief council of the Jews and told them of their intention and devised a plan to have the Romans bring Paul down for further questioning. Therefore, the forty would seize and kill Paul before he reached the council. This incident became the first link of circumstances which brought Paul from Jerusalem to Rome. It is emphasized here not only the villainy of the assassins, but the utter degradation of the national council and thus the hopeless apostasy of the Jewish nation.

Paul's nephew discovered their plot and defeated it by reporting to the Roman commander. The Roman commander realized that the life of a Roman citizen was threatened by the Jews of Jerusalem. He took all precautions to secure the life of Paul. The Roman commander prepared an escort of soldiers and cavalry to take Paul to Antipatris and on to Caesarea where he would be under the care of the Roman governor, Felix. The emphases of this narrative may be to show how

much more Paul's life would be secure and just in the hands of a heathen government than under the degenerate rulers of the professed people of God.

The chief captain, Claudius Lysias, sent along with Paul a letter, addressed to Felix, in which as far as possible he set forth the facts of the case. The letter of the chief captain opens with a lie; the officer affirms that he rescued Paul from the mob when he learned that Paul was a Roman. We recall the truth that when Paul was arrested the captain believed Paul to be an Egyptian rebel. Even so the impression made upon the reader by the sketch of this old Roman is, in the main, favorable. The captain knew his duty, he is prompt in his action, he is loyal to the empire, and he is courteous to Paul and even gentle to his nephew. In his letter to the governor he sates all that he can for the welfare of the apostle, stating that he has "but under no accusation deserving death or imprisonment." Even this sturdy soldier forms a striking contrast to the Jewish High Priest. Every item of the narrative emphasizes the depth to which the Jewish nation has fallen and the comparative honor of the Roman government.

Felix, the first governor that Paul appeared before, was a man of ignoble character. He learned the province that Paul belonged to and then remanded him to prison until his accusers should arrive from Jerusalem.

Chapter 24

Verses 1-27

Luke gives us a less than full description of the character of Felix, however, history describes him a cruel and profligate. The authors design in this chapter is to reveal the innocence of Paul, and therefore the increasing and shameless ignominy of his enemies, the Jews. The High Priest and other rulers bring with them an orator as their spokesman named Tertullus. Their endeavor is to prove Paul a criminal and to show them innocent in rejecting the gospel Paul preaches. How eagerly men will seek an excuse for rejecting Christ, and yet by such rejection one is already self-condemned.

Tertullus opens his speech with such empty bombast as to be really ludicrous. He gives praise to the "most excellent Felix" for the quiet and order his government has secured, knowing perfectly well that greater abuse had never been allowed to exist, and that if the governor had suppressed a few bandits, it was only because he coveted their booty for himself. Tertullus then describes Paul as a man of evil character, and brings three definite indictments against him. Tertullus first declares Paul guilty of sedition, then of heresy, and lastly of sacrilege.

Jewish witnesses are brought forth who perjure themselves in swearing to the truth of these false charges, Paul then defends himself by arguments which are clear and convincing. Paul pays Felix the only possible compliment which an honest man could offer, namely, that the governor has had ample opportunity to become acquainted with Jewish Law and customs. Paul disdains to notice the aspersion on his character made by Tertullus, but answers the three charges in order. As to sedition, it is absurd to suppose Paul guilty, for he had been in Jerusalem less than a week, and in that short time he had addressed no assembly and had gathered no crowd. Neither is there a shred of evidence to support the charge.

As to heresy, Paul confesses that he is a Christian, but as such he accepts the whole of the Old Testament, the scriptures held sacred by the Jews, he holds the glorious hope therein set forth, and in its power he has kept his conscience void of offense. As to the last charge of sacrilege, Paul shows that instead of treating the Jewish Holy Place as profane, he had come to Jerusalem to bring alms to the people and offerings to the Temple, where he was engaged in performing the most sacred rites when he was falsely accused and arrested. Further that those who have accused him are not now even present, and the Jews who are accusing him are not competent witnesses, as they have already investigated his case in their own chief tribunal and have found that his only fault is his professed belief in a doctrine of “resurrection” which many of the members of that tribunal themselves believe.

Paul presented an unanswerable argument; even Felix could not question its force. Felix wishing to please the Jews pretended to withhold his decision until the arrival of Lysias from Jerusalem. The truth is, Felix already had the favorable testimony of this “chief Captain.” Felix placed Paul back in the prison but allowing him the greatest possible liberty he virtually acquitted the apostle.

Paul was given another hearing before Felix and his wife, Paul reasoned with such power as to “righteousness, and self-control, and the judgment to come,” that the guilty Felix was terrified, and declared that he would hear Paul further at a more convenient time. This was a poor excuse on the part of Felix for not reforming his own life and for denying justice to Paul. The real cause of the delay was his enslavement to sin. Felix also hoped that the delay in his decision would result in the offer of a bribe by the friends of Paul. The result was that Paul was kept in prison until Felix was succeeded as governor by Porcius Festus.

Chapter 25

Verses 1-27

Paul appealed to Caesar not because of impatience or anger of cowardice on his part, but rather to the indecision, injustice, and treachery of a Roman ruler. Porcius Festus was a man of higher character than that of Felix, who he succeeded as governor, but his discreditable conduct toward Paul brings into clear relief the innocence of the apostle and emphasizes the guilt of the Jews, who were falsely accusing him and seeking his life. The closing chapters of the Acts are burdened with the fact of Israel’s sin of rejecting the gospel as it is represented in the preaching and the person of the apostles Paul.

Festus was a restless man and true to that nature quickly after his appointment as governor he paid a visit to Jerusalem. It now has been two years since Paul was rescued from the Jewish mob, and carried prisoner to Caesarea. The Jews were still the same in their hatred of Paul and in their utter moral abasement. The Jewish rulers reported to the new Roman governor that Paul was a vile criminal who “ought not to live any longer” and they requested that he be brought to Jerusalem for trial “setting an ambush to kill him on the way.” We must remember that those who vowed to kill Paul so many months before represented the chief council, and therefore, the nation of the Jews. Festus properly refused and advised the rulers to come to Caesarea if they wished to bring charges against Paul. A few days later, and followed by the Jewish rulers, Festus returned to Caesarea and immediately summoned Paul before his judgment seat. Of Paul’s trial before Festus no details are

given. As usual the Jews had brought against Paul many and grievous charges which they could not prove. The Jews have never had a case against Paul but it is evident their motive was mad hatred because of his unwavering allegiance to Christ.

Festus wanting to gain favor with the Jews asked Paul if he was willing to go to Jerusalem for trial. Why a trial when the innocence of Paul was already clear to the judge? Why to Jerusalem, where the life of Paul would be imperiled by the Jewish assassins? If Paul deserved death or good could come from it, Paul was ready to die, but if it was to gratify thirst for blood, and if the Roman governor was unwilling to defend an innocent Roman citizen, there was but one thing Paul could do, appeal to the decision of the emperor.

With Paul's cry for an appeal to the emperor there was but one thing that Festus could say: "to Caesar you shall go." The decision of Festus put him in an awkward predicament. Festus now had to send to Rome an appeal for a man whom he was unable to formulate any charges which would stand in a Roman court. How would this make Festus look as an administrator of justice in a Roman province when at last all the facts should be presented before the Emperor? This was an embarrassing situation Festus found himself in, but this is the place men bring themselves when they seek to win favor by acting contrary to conscience, and when they reverse decisions that they know to be right.

The providence of God overruled the fault of Festus and by it effected His purpose to bring Paul to Rome. Before the apostle sailed, the distress of Festus afforded Paul an opportunity of preaching the gospel before the most distinguished and powerful audience he had ever faced.

King Agrippa, the son of Herod who had beheaded James and imprisoned Peter, paid a visit to Festus. The Roman governor thought that King Agrippa, a Jew, might be able to find some wrong in Paul which he could frame as a charge when Paul should be sent to Rome. Festus rehearsed the story to the king, but was careful to conceal his own injustice and treachery in the case. Two things Festus made clear. First, that Paul was innocent of any crime, and secondly, that the essential point in the gospel which Paul preached and the main cause of Jewish hatred lay in the doctrine of resurrection.

To Festus' delight his royal guest was eager to hear Paul speak. Losing no time on the next day a brilliant company assembled to listen to Paul's greatest and last recorded defense. Paul enjoyed some advantages in his arguments. Paul's judges already believed him to be innocent of serious fault, none of his Jewish enemies were present to present their false charges, Paul could speak with freedom and could state fully the facts of his conversion from Judaism and of his relation to Christ. While Paul's address is intensely personal, it holds great value as a defense of Christianity, as a statement of its relation to Judaism, and as an exhibition of its character as a religion for the whole world.

Chapter 26

Verses 1-32

Paul's address before King Agrippa is more than a defense of his innocence or a review of his personal religious experience. Paul presents a superb statement of the very essence of Christianity, and as one reads this historic speech two or three of its propositions should be especially noted. It is Paul's insistence that faith in a risen, divine Christ is the very heart of Christianity, that the resurrection is attested by competent human witnesses and by inspired scriptures, that the message of salvation through Christ is intended for the whole race of mankind.

To King Agrippa Paul pays the only compliment that would have been honest. Agrippa was "expert in all customs and questions among the Jews," and as Paul has been accused by the Jews in matters exclusively Jewish and religious, he is "happy" to present his case before such a judge. Paul's implication is that the matters are Jewish and religions, he is innocent of any crime which Roman law will recognize.

Paul is a prisoner for the charges of heresy and sacrilege, he shows at once that it is absurd, as he himself is a Jew of the strictest sect, and he is held guilty because he believes and teaches the essential doctrine of Judaism, namely the hope of a Messiah. Paul is therefore innocent before Roman law, as Judaism is a religion permitted by Rome, and he cannot be accused as a heretic by the Jews.

There are two points that Paul differs from his fellow Jews in reference to the Messiah. One is the belief that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah, and the other is his message that, through faith in Jesus, Gentiles as well as Jews can be saved. The resurrection of Jesus has convinced Paul that He is the Christ. To Jews the fact of resurrection is not a thing "judged incredible," and the fact that Jesus has risen is a truth in favor of which Paul has not been prejudiced. Paul once persecuted all who so believed, but on his way to Damascus he actually saw Jesus, risen and glorified, and thus he can no longer question his claims or doubt His saving power. As to his preaching to the Gentiles, Paul shows that this was not a self-imposed task but in obedience to a commission received personally from his divine Lord. It is spoken in words that every Christian follower does well to keep in mind today: "to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me." How could Paul be disobedient to a heavenly vision, how could he fail to preach repentance and faith in Christ at Jerusalem, and throughout the country of Judaea, and also to the Gentiles, and how could the Jews be justified in having seized him in the Temple and assayed to kill him? In these points the Jews, and not Paul, should be charged with heresy, for the Old Testament Scriptures had testified that the Christ was to suffer and to rise again, and was to be the source of light and life, both to Jews and to Gentiles. Therefore, how can one be guilty if he accepts Jesus as the Messiah and testifies for Him to small and great?

Festus heard little that he could understand, and as Paul spoke of resurrection of a crucified Jew, and of light and life being brought into the world by Him, he became impatient and cried out in ignorant intolerance, "Paul, you are out of your mind!" Paul responded with courtesy and turned

to King Agrippa and said, "King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do." King Agrippa was not so easily to become a witness for Paul. With disdainful irony he replied, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian." Then Paul not losing the true perspective responded with, "I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains."

Chapter 27

Verses 1-44

In this Chapter of Acts the author, Luke, is describing the most thrilling and perilous adventure of his life, and further he is depicting scenes in which the central figure is that of his great hero, Paul. Of course, this shipwreck was a part of the history he is writing, but there must have been something more than the dramatic character of the event to make Luke feel that he should describe it at such length. What then has been the purpose of these closing chapters of the Acts? Has it not been to show how the gospel was rejected by the Jews, and how the future center of its proclamation was not to be Jerusalem but Rome? We find this adventure as a separation of the experiences of the apostle in the province of Judea from those which were his in the capitol city of the empire.

This story contains a new revelation of the striking personality of Paul, and prepares the reader for his great Epistles which follow. Then, too, there appear on the vary surface of the narrative lessons of practical importance both for the Christian life and service.

Paul is being sent to Rome as a prisoner. There is much to lessen the distress of this cruel experience; Paul goes as an innocent man in who the governor who sends him can find no fault. Rome has long been the goal of Paul's ambition, he has been assured that the journey is in fulfillment of a divine purpose, he is allowed the help of two comrades, one of them a beloved physician, he enjoys the confidence, even the affection, of the Roman officer who is in charge the company of prisoners with whom he is to travel. The very first day after putting to sea the vessel touches at Sidon, and there Luke says the centurion "treated Paul kindly, and gave him leave to go unto his friends and refresh himself.

Along the usual trade route they reach Myra on the coast of Lycia, and there change vessels, embarking on a ship from Alexandria which is bound for Italy. They sail to the island of Crete and stop at a place called Fair Havens, where Paul advises them to winter. Paul's advice is overruled and a harbor is sought farther west. Hardly has the ship put to sea when it is caught by a fierce gale, with difficulty the lifeboat is drawn aboard, the ship is strengthened by the cables, and then allowed to drive before the wind. The storm grows worse the next day and it becomes necessary to cast overboard the freight and all unnecessary tackle. Then for fourteen days and nights, with all bearings lost, without sight of sun or stars, the voyagers are at the mercy of the tempest until all hope is abandoned. Then Paul appears and gives new heart to his companions, he assures them that the God he serves has sent a message declaring that they are all to be saved but they will be wrecked on an island.

For intelligent men, however, the assurance of a divine purpose and promise never lessens the need for human action and effort. Paul is alert, and practically assumes command of the ship. During the night the soundings show they are being driven close to an unknown coast, and as the sailors try to escape with the boat, Paul declares that the sailors must remain with the boat or they will be lost. Paul again speaks words of hope and urges them to break their long fast. Paul sets the example but not before first returning thanks to God for the food and then encourages them to eat. The refreshment is needed, for at daybreak as they seek to thrust the ship into a sheltering bay, she is caught by the waves and driven upon the beach, and soon broken in pieces. As Paul had promised, by swimming, or by clinging to broken pieces of the wreck, everyone of the ships company is rescued.

How often followers of Christ have had the experience of Paul and in time of storm and peril has been assured of the power and presence and protection of their Lord? How often, too, has their faith made them appear heroic figures towering above all their comrades both in courage and in promptness of action, as they have testified by word and deed to the goodness of their Lord? How often too when the cause of Christ has been imperiled, has it been found through the storms and tempest a divine hand is still in control, and that there is being achieved the divine purpose of bringing the gospel into all the world and to every creature.

Chapter 28

Verses 1-10

There is a pitiful contrast between the Jewish priest and the Roman governors of Judea to the barbarians of Melita. The former were plotting against Paul's life and imprisoning him as a felon. The latter showed him no common kindness and came to regard him as a god. There is a beautiful picture here in the hospitality shown by the islanders to the shipwrecked company. On a winter morning, during a chilling rain, running to the beach, they drag from the breakers the weary, terrified survivors of the wreck. The islanders build for them a fire and seek to do all in their power to relieve discomfort and distress. The Gospel rejected by the Jews, is being carried to the heathen, and these natives of Melita are not the last to show that human sympathy is universal, or at least to offer kindness to the missionary of the cross.

An incident occurs which deeply impresses the barbarians. Paul is, of course, helping with the fire, as he is throwing on a bundle of sticks which he has gathered, when suddenly a viper, driven from the fire by the heat, fastens itself on his hand. The natives know well that the bite is deadly; they at once conclude that Paul must be a murderer, who, escaping from the sea, is now overtaken by divine justice. Surely the heathens have a conscience which accuse them and which teach them that wrong will be punished and that the soul that sins must die; what they lack is not so much the sense of sin, as the knowledge of how they can be saved. But when these natives see that Paul suffers no harm from the poisonous snake, which they have supposed as fatal, they change their minds and say that Paul is a god.

Paul is speedily brought to the home of "the chief man of the island, named Publius. The father of Publius is seriously ill, but as Paul prays he is instantly healed. The news spreads quickly amongst

the natives and we are told that “the rest also that had diseases in the island came in, and were cured.

The islanders honored the company with Paul and they left three months later with such things as they needed for their remaining journey to Rome.

Verses 11-31

The last stage of Paul’s journey to Rome is briefly narrated by the author. The historian is now concerned with the reception Paul is given in the imperial city, first by the church, secondly by the Roman officials, and thirdly by the Jews.

After a prosperous voyage northward from Melita, touching at Syracuse and Rhegium, Paul and his party landed at Puteoli, some on hundred fifty miles from Rome. They receive a cordial greeting from the Christians who they find there and they are made to feel that their journey has already ended. News of Paul’s arrival was carried to the city, and as he approached he found delegations from the church coming out to meet him, first at the Market at Appius, and then at the Three Taverns, distant respectively forty-three and thirty-three miles from Rome. Paul’s heart was filled with joy when he saw these brethren who came out to meet him; "he thanked God and took courage." Paul know knew the desire of his heart, the object of his prayers, was to be realized, and that in Rome he was to receive and was to give that spiritual help of which he had written three years before in his great Epistle addressed to these same beloved brethren.

The Roman officials treated Paul in a desirable way. The letter from Porcius Festus could have charged Paul with no crime, and the report of the centurion Julius must have disposed the authorities to regard Paul with favor, and as the story closes, he is pictured as abiding by himself "And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered."

The main interest of the story is given to Paul’s reception by the Jews. Almost immediately upon his arrival a conference is held with their chief representatives. Of the unjust treatment Paul informs them, but insures them he has no intention of bring charges against his own nation. Paul is a loyal Jew, and was held as a prisoner only because of his devotion to the hope which centers in the Messiah, which is the hope of all Israel. The Jews reply that they have not received any evil reports concerning Paul, and that they are eager to hear what he has to say concerning the sect to which he belongs and which is everywhere spoken against. On an appointed day Paul speaks at great length, presenting the full gospel message, and proving from the scriptures the truths concerning the death and resurrection and coming Kingdom of Christ. It is a time for solemn decision. Some of the Jews accept Paul’s message, but a mass the Jews reject his message. It is then that Paul announces the doom of the nation, even as in the day of Isaiah, a judicial blindness is visited upon Israel “until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in.” some Jews will be saved, but the nation is rejected. “Be it known therefore unto you,” declares the apostle, “that this salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles: they will also hear.” Here at the imperial center of the Gentile world the representative Jews are refusing the gospel as they have refused it in Jerusalem, and wherever Paul has preached. The doom of the nation is sealed, the sentence is pronounced by the

apostles. Their only hope is in a future national repentance and acceptance of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah and King.

Acts closes with an apparent abruptness. What became of Paul? Was he released from imprisonment? To what further labors was he called? What was the end of his career? These questions are natural. We must remember that the Acts is not a history of the life of Paul. Acts is a history, which tells how the Church of Christ was founded, how it was broadened from a Jewish sect to a universal brotherhood, and how it was enlarged by establishing radiating centers throughout the empire, beginning in Jerusalem and extending to Rome. Acts has been so narrated that the reader feels a true interest in the church and a deep desire to hasten the preaching of the gospel to all the world and to every creature.