



Acts

A COMMENTARY OUTLINE

A HISTORY OF THE
EARLY CHURCH

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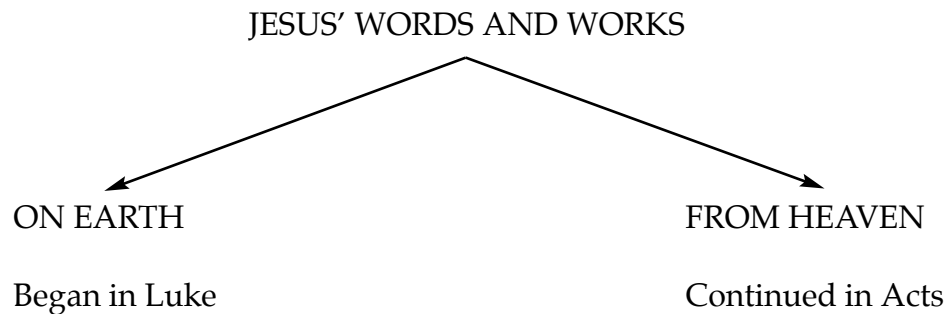
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Introduction to Acts

or "Preview of Acts"

"Acts of the Apostles" is the name given to this book since the middle of the second century. It is the second volume of two books written by Luke, the first of which is his Gospel account of the life of Jesus. The following diagram helps to visualize the relationship of the two books.



Acts 1:1 describes the whole book as the continuation of another by the same author, concerning the same subject. The two volumes could be described as follows: Luke, the beginning of the words and works of Jesus; Acts, the continuation of the words and works of Jesus.

The content of Acts is different from the New Testament epistles. Romans, for example, is a book of doctrine; but Acts is a book of history recording the first thirty years of church life. Acts records historical facts; the epistles interpret these facts.

It is important to keep in mind that Acts is a transitional book. Only two times in the ministry of Jesus did He mention the church, and in both cases it was spoken of in future tense. Acts should be viewed as the recording of the events that occurred in the transition from the Old Testament setting to the church age.

From the Ascension to Pentecost *or "Forty Days and After"*

Acts 1:1-26

THE OUTLINE

- A. The Prologue 1:1-5
 - 1. The Summary of Luke's Gospel 1:1-2
 - 2. The Certainty of the Resurrection 1:3
 - 3. The Review of Instructions 1:4-5
- B. The Mandate 1:6-8
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- E. The Selection 1:15-16
 - 1. The Proposal of Peter 1:15-22
 - 2. The Selection of the Assembly 1:23-26

THE COMMENTARY

THE PROLOGUE 1:1-5

The Summary of Luke's Gospel 1:1-2

"The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, ²until the day He was taken up, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen."

The Gospel of Luke: Its Designation

Theophilus is mentioned here and in Luke 1:3, where he is called “most excellent.” This single word was an honorary form of address for those who were higher officially or socially than the speaker. It was frequently used of Roman officials, such as Felix in Acts 23:26 and Festus in Acts 26:25. Sometimes, however, it was used in polite address with no official connotation. We do not know which is true of Theophilus. Was he a Roman official? There is a wide range of speculation in Christian literature. We do not know for certain, however, because we do not have the data to answer the question.

The word *account* was used of books containing more than one volume. It was used in a technical sense of works that contained more than one papyrus roll, which was normally about thirty-five feet in length. In speaking of his Gospel as containing *all that Jesus began*, the author is using neither exaggeration nor hyperbole. The word *all* refers to everything within the scope of Luke’s plan and purpose.

The Gospel of Luke: Its Content

Luke’s Gospel contained what Jesus began to do and teach. The verb *began* connotes two things. First, it implies that the work of Jesus will continue after the ascension. This is affirmed by Jesus Himself in John 14:12 and 16:12-13, anticipating greater works and further revelation for the disciples. Second, *began* looks to the past. What Jesus had taught and done had never been taught and done before.

The Gospel of Luke: Its Scope

Acts 1:2 contains two words indicating temporal order: they are *until* and *after*. *Until* ties to the event of the ascension; *after* ties to the command to remain in Jerusalem.

The command of Luke 24:49 says, “ ‘And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.’ ” Four observations are important. First, the words contain a promise. Second, they prescribe an activity—they are *to stay*. Third, they designate a place—the *city* (Jerusalem). Finally, they anticipate a blessing described as *power from on high*.

The word order of verse 2 is different in the Greek New Testament. The sentence begins with the words *until the day*, followed immediately with *given orders*. This makes Jesus’ last command the focal point of the verse.

The Certainty of the Resurrection 1:3

“To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.”

The Disciples Were Convinced by His Appearance 1:3a

The most comprehensive list of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances is found in I Corinthians 15. The appearances were many, not few. They were not questionable but irrefutable. The word translated *convincing proofs* is *tekmarion* and was used by both Plato and Aristotle for the strongest proof to which a thing was susceptible. Finally, they were not isolated but distributed over forty days.

All of this took place *after His suffering*. The use of the word *suffer* to mean death is a common idiom of the New Testament (Luke 22:15, Acts 3:18). Reference to suffering as death is particularly clear in Acts 17:3 where it is set opposite "rise(ing) again from the dead."

The word *appearing* is used to describe actual objects of physical sight; it is never used of a vision.

The Disciples Were Convinced by His Speech 1:3b

Jesus' words concerning the kingdom apparently stirred some embers of hope in the disciples that now was the time for a political theocracy to return to the nation. Jesus will correct the disciples in verses 7 and 8.

The Review of Instructions 1:4-5

"And gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, 'Which,' He said, 'you heard from Me; ⁵for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'"

The geographical aspect of Jesus' command should not be overlooked. The command to remain in Jerusalem implies that were they elsewhere they would miss the fulfillment of the promise.

The promise made by the Father and spoken by Jesus may be seen in John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26-27; 16:7-15. Running through all of these passages is an emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit that is to be anticipated—His work in relationship to truth (14:17, 15:26, 16:13); His work in relationship to revelation (14:26, 16:13-15); His work in regard to the disciples (14:15-17); and finally, in relationship to the world (16:9-11).

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is never mentioned in the Old Testament; the Gospels allude to it in Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8, and Luke 3:16. Acts 1:5 views it as future but very near, associating it with the day of Pentecost. I Corinthians 12:13 refers to it as the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit wherein He places believers in the body of Christ. This being the case, it is not unusual to find that we are never told to seek it. In every instance where Paul speaks to Christians about it, he treats it as an accomplished fact.

The baptism of the Spirit may be summarized as follows: It is unmentioned in the Old Testament, prophetic in the Gospels, historic in Acts, and realized in the epistles.

THE MANDATE 1:6-8

The Question 1:6

"And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, 'Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?'"

Jesus had been teaching about the kingdom (1:3). The disciples apparently thought of it in terms of a Jewish kingdom—a political theocracy. Jesus' reply does not deny that the kingdom will come someday; He does say two things concerning it. First, the time of its appearance is unknown to them; second, the presence of it is irrelevant for them at this juncture.

The Correction 1:7

"He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority . . .'"

Times translates *chronos*, a word that stresses duration; *epochs* is *kairos* and refers to events that occur within the duration of time. Titus 1:2-3 is a good illustration of each word. "In the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages (*chronos*) ago, but at the proper time (*kairos*) was manifested. . . ." The kingdom as they understood it is not to be the issue in the church.

The Commission 1:8

" ' . . . but you shall 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.' "

Involves a Contrast

The word *but* is a strong adversative introducing contrast. The function of the new age stands in contrast to that which they had known or in which they had participated in the past. The new age involves a new power. The KJV says that promised power comes "after the Holy Spirit has come upon you." The word *after* conveys the idea of sequence of events. The Greek is a simple participle *having come upon you*. The action of the coming of the Spirit and the receiving of power is simultaneous. One does not follow the other; both occur at the same moment. For the Spirit to come upon them is to be empowered at that same moment.

Involves a Person

The words *My witnesses* focus upon a theme of the book of Acts. The word *witness* occurs in some form about thirty-nine times. Acts 2:32, 3:15, 5:32, 10:39, 13:31, and 22:14-15 are examples.

Involves a Power

The future tense verb *you shall receive* is indicative mood. This means there are no *ifs* and *ands* about it. Their witness flowed forth as normal and inevitable manifestation of this power.

Involves a Program**REACHING JERUSALEM**

This is the theme of Acts 1-7. Through persecution, Christians will be driven from Jerusalem taking the gospel with them as they are dispersed. The church operates within the confines of Jewish thought and practice in the early chapters of Acts.

REACHING JUDEA AND SAMARIA

The move forth into the regions about Jerusalem begins with Acts 8-9.

REACHING THE EARTH

From the house of Cornelius (Acts 10), the gospel goes west and eventually reaches imperial Rome in Acts 28.

THE ASCENSION 1:9-11**The Event 1:9**

"And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight."

The ascension was a historical event attested by eyewitnesses. This is stressed by the words *while they were looking on*. Christianity is not a mystical religion but a historical one—it builds on time and space events. Jesus did not disappear or vanish; His body simply passed out of their range of vision. Though not mentioned here in verse 9, the place is indicated in verse 12 as the Mt. of Olives. The disciples had experienced a number of appearances of the Lord over the last forty days, but this is the final one. No further appearances were granted them.

The cloud symbolized divine presence, as in Exodus 40:34 and Mark 9:7. A cloud had enveloped Jesus and His disciples on the Mt. of Transfiguration and was a visible sign of the presence of God and the approval of His Son.

The transfiguration, the ascension, and His return (Matthew 24:30) are the three successive manifestations of Christ's glory.

The Lesson 1:10-11

"And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them; ¹¹and they also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? 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 meaning of the ascension is more important to Luke than its description. The message of the angels is two-fold. First, the Jesus the disciples had known now has a heavenly residence. This is stressed by the four-fold repetition of the words *into heaven*. The identical expression in the Greek is translated *into the sky* twice and *into heaven* twice. Second, Jesus will return the same way the disciples had seen Him go. The pronoun *this* with Jesus is an intensive demonstrative pronoun meaning *this very same Jesus*. The ascension is viewed as a preview of Christ's second coming. The same person will come in the same body and return to the same place (Zechariah 14:4).

THE UPPER ROOM 1:12-14

"Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. ¹³And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. ¹⁴These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers."

In the Old Testament, the presence of God was associated with the tabernacle and the temple. Because of this, they were very significant buildings. No significance, however, is assigned to the upper room; it was merely a meeting place. God's presence is now to find residence in individual believers, not in buildings.

Mary the mother of Jesus was there, and it is important to note what she was doing. Mary was simply joining the others in worship of Jesus. This is the last time she appears in New Testament history.

THE SELECTION 1:15-26

The Proposal of Peter 1:15-22

The Place of Judas 1:15-17

THE PROPHECY OF DAVID 1:15-16

"And at this time Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty persons was there together), and said, ¹⁶'Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.'"

Though incidental to the point being made, verse 16 shows Peter's testimony to the divine inspiration of the writings of David in the Psalms. Both Peter, who spoke these words, and Luke, who recorded them, regarded David's writings to be the voice of the Holy Spirit.

THE PORTION OF JUDAS 1:17

" 'For he was counted among us, and received his portion in this ministry.' "

Peter now assigns a reason why the fate of Judas concerned them. Judas had been one of them, not only in appearance but by actual participation in the ministry.

The Death of Judas 1:18-19

"(Now this man acquired a field with the price of his wickedness; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. ¹⁹And it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language that field was called Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)"

The chief historical problem here is the reconciliation of Acts 1:18-19 with Matthew 27:3-10, especially in terms of how Judas died. While Matthew tells us he "hanged himself," Acts indicates that he died by falling.

It would be well to ask ourselves, How do we deal with problems of this sort? Certain observations may be made in response to such a question. There is a difference between a real contradiction and an apparent one. The liberal critic inevitably sees a problem as a real contradiction and passes immediate judgment on the accuracy of Scripture. On the other hand, one who believes the claims of Scripture to be the very word of God withholds judgment and anticipates that further study will clear away the apparent contradiction. Every field of human learning faces antinomies (laws that seem to contradict one another).

When problems such as the one presented here arise, one must be aware that the data that would supply the answer may be lacking. Sometimes the data comes forth with further study; sometimes one must wait and perhaps never find the material that would solve the problem. This does not mean it does not exist; it means we have not discovered it yet.

Finally, nothing may be called a contradiction if one can display a feasible solution. Luke tells us Judas fell, but from where did he fall? He obviously fell from some significant height since the fall was fatal. Could he not have fallen from the place where he hanged himself?

The Replacement of Judas 1:20-22

" 'For it is written in the book of Psalms, "Let his homestead be made desolate, and let no man dwell in it "; and, "His office let another man take." ²¹It is therefore necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us—²²beginning with the baptism of John, until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these should become a witness with us of His resurrection.' "

In Peter's view, the death of Judas called for specific action on the part of the remaining disciples. Was Peter right or wrong in suggesting action at this point? Some believe he was wrong and make the following points. First, Peter understood the passage in Psalms correctly—Judas was to be replaced. Second, Peter should have waited for God to provide the replacement for Judas because time proved, so some argue, that the twelfth apostle was Paul, not Matthias. Third, we never hear of Matthias again. It should be noted that Paul did not meet the qualification of Acts 1:21-22. Was this qualification that of Peter or of God? We are not told. The selection of Matthias did not preclude Paul who was called directly by God to the office of apostle.

The Selection of the Assembly 1:23-26

The Candidates 1:23

"And they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias."

Identity of the above with any degree of certainty is impossible, though mentioned by Eusebius. A problem with this action does arise. If the assembly (or the apostles) were competent to choose two, why were they not competent to choose one? If the ultimate choice was God's, then by what right should the assembly limit Him to two?

The Prayer 1:24-25

"And they prayed, and said, 'Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two Thou hast chosen ²⁵to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.'"

The reference to Judas's own place is equivalent to hell, but the apostles are always careful in making reference to the state of Judas after his betrayal of Jesus.

The Lots 1:26

"And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles."

The casting of lots had firm foundation in the Old Testament as seen in Proverbs 16:33, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord." There is no New Testament example of this procedure after the Holy Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost, however.

The Day of Pentecost

or "The Coming of the Holy Spirit"

Acts 2:1-13

THE OUTLINE

- A. The Description of the Event 2:1-4
 - 1. The Time Element
 - 2. The Geographical Element
 - 3. The Physical Element
- B. The Discussion of the Event 2:5-13
 - 1. Some Were Bewildered 2:5-12
 - 2. Some Were Mocking 2:13

THE COMMENTARY

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE EVENT 2:1-4

"And when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. ⁴And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance."

The Time Element

The words *had come* are from a compound verb to *fulfill* plus an intensifying preposition. We could translate "was being fulfilled completely." It was used in the Septuagint to indicate the completion of a time period. In what sense was Pentecost a fulfillment—what did it fulfill? The answer is found in the sequence of the feasts

of Israel. First came Passover (Leviticus 23:4-5), followed by first fruits (Leviticus 23:10-11), and then Pentecost (Leviticus 23:15-16).

The cross is where Christ became our Passover (I Corinthians 5:7); His resurrection is associated with first fruits (I Corinthians 15:20); and the beginning of the formation of a unique body called the church finds its inception in Pentecost (Acts 2:1).

There is nothing haphazard about the day of Pentecost; it was a planned event scheduled to happen at a specific time. Passover, first fruits, and Pentecost are each “once-for-all” in character; and each marks off an eternal accomplishment. The cross solved the sin problem forever; the resurrection marked the success of the cross forever; and the Day of Pentecost marked the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell believers forever (John 14:16).

The Geographical Element

Jesus’ instructions in Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:4 are specific as to locality. The disciples are to gather in Jerusalem. As the entire book of Acts shows, the church started at Jerusalem and spread forth from there. Pentecost was a Jewish event with gentile Christianity entering the picture in Acts 10.

The Physical Element

The coming of the Holy Spirit was accompanied by sight and sound phenomena. Fire is associated with the presence of God, as seen in Exodus 3:2-3, 13:21, 24:1, and 40:38.

Tongues are spoken of three times in Acts. The first occurrence is here on the Day of Pentecost, the second in Acts 10:46, and the third in Acts 19:6. Acts 2 is the only place the phenomenon is explained. It is portrayed as an understandable foreign language.

THE DISCUSSION OF THE EVENT 2:5-13

Some Were Bewildered 2:5-12

Over What Occurred 2:5-6

“Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men, from every nation under heaven. ⁶And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were bewildered, because they were each one hearing them speak in his own language.”

Jews from many countries were in Jerusalem at this time because it was only in the temple that the “holy convocation” could be celebrated. The sound of the wind attracted their attention, but the speaking in tongues caused their amazement. The consternation caused by the event is emphasized by the words *bewildered* (2:6), *were amazed* (2:7), *marveled* (2:7), and *continued in amazement and great perplexity* (2:12).

Over Who Participated 2:7-11

"And they were amazed and marveled, saying, 'Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans?' ⁸And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? ⁹Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.' "

Galileans had discernible speech peculiarities. They supposedly had difficulty pronouncing gutturals and tended to "swallow" syllables. They were looked down upon by the rest of the Palestinian population.

Each area mentioned in verses 9-11 had considerable Jewish population. The listing of fifteen entities assures us the phenomenon of tongues refers to known human languages.

Over What This Means 2:12

"And they continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' "

What does this mean is an idiom, which translated literally says "What will (verb) this be (infinitive)?"

Some Were Mocking 2:13

"But others were mocking and saying, 'They are full of sweet wine.' "

The vintage was yet some time away, but there were means of keeping wine sweet all year long. Intoxication is the metaphor that expresses the filling of the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).

The Sermon at Pentecost *or "Jesus of Nazareth"*

Acts 2:14-47

THE OUTLINE

- A. Its Introduction 2:14-21
 - 1. What the Phenomenon of Pentecost Was Not 2:14-15
 - 2. What the Phenomenon of Pentecost Was 2:16-21
- B. Its Theme 2:22-36
 - 1. Jesus of Nazareth: His Accreditation 2:22
 - 2. Jesus of Nazareth: His Death 2:23
 - 3. Jesus of Nazareth: His Resurrection 2:24-32
 - 4. Jesus of Nazareth: His Ascension 2:33
 - 5. Jesus of Nazareth: His Office 2:34-36
- C. Its Outcome 2:37-40
 - 1. Relative to the Crowd 2:37
 - 2. Relative to the Apostles 2:38-40
- D. Its Results 2:41-47
 - 1. Initial Results 2:41-42
 - 2. The Ongoing Results 2:43-47

THE COMMENTARY

ITS INTRODUCTION 2:14-21

What the Phenomenon of Pentecost Was Not 2:14-15

"But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: 'Men of Judea, and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give heed to my words. ¹⁵For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day...'"

All males twelve and over were required to come to Jerusalem three times a year for Jewish festivals of which Pentecost was one. At this time, the city would be teeming with people. The charge of drunkenness is used by Peter to introduce his message. It is probable that the charge was made in jest, and Peter's reply is brief and in good humor.

What the Phenomenon of Pentecost Was 2:16-21

The Link to the Prophet Joel 2:16

"... but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel..."

The phrase *this is what* may be understood in two ways. It may be taken to mean "this is the fulfillment of what," or it may be taken to mean "this is like that."

Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, interpreters have discovered what is called a "pesher." A pesher lays emphasis on the fulfillment without attempting to interpret the details of the prophecy. It looks at a general prophecy and says, "This fits!" Peter links the phenomenon of Pentecost to the prophecy of Joel in this way.

The question in the minds of Peter's listeners was, What does this mean? Events of the Bible are often not self-explanatory and require verbal interpretation of their meaning. The cross of Christ illustrates this point. The historical fact is Christ died, but what does this mean? How is His death significant? I Corinthians 15:3 provides the explanation of the event by adding the prepositional phrase "for our sins." The resurrection is similar, for we are told Christ was "raised (history) because of our justification (explanation)."

Pentecost was not self-explanatory, and this is why Peter is about to offer his explanation. No one who witnessed the phenomenon of Pentecost could explain it. Our translation of Acts 2:12 omits an important word—*all*. We should read "and they all (*pantes*) continued in amazement."

One of the significant features of prophecy is that its fulfillment may not occur in one event only or in one event completely. There

may be a historic-futuristic combination. Hosea 11:1 provides a good example. The prophet says, "When Israel was a youth I loved him, and out of Egypt I have called My son." *My son* is an obvious reference to Israel and God's delivery of the nation as recorded in the early chapters of Exodus. On the other hand, Matthew 2:15 refers to this passage as fulfilled in Jesus as His parents bring Him back from Egypt. Fulfillment of prophecy may therefore be complete (one event satisfies its prediction), or it may be partial (fulfillment has begun but awaits future completion).

Prophecy is always fulfilled in the most precise and literal manner. Since this is true, Pentecost could not be the complete fulfillment of Joel's prophecy because signs such as blood, fire, vapors of smoke, and the turning of the sun into darkness and the moon to blood did not occur. The pouring forth of God's Spirit did occur, however, though not on all mankind.

The Words of the Prophet Joel 2:17-21

" ' "And it shall be in the last days," God says, "that I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; ¹⁸even upon My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit and they shall prophesy. ¹⁹And I will grant wonders in the sky above, and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. ²⁰The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come. ²¹And it shall be, that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." ' "

The words *in the last days* are not found in Joel's prophecy but are the interpretation of Peter. According to Hebrews 1:1-2, these days were introduced by the coming of Christ. They extend to His return. Acts 2:17-21 describes how these days open and how they close.

Verse 17 begins with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit as at Pentecost, and verse 20 ends with the *day of the Lord*. The truth of verse 21 shows the terms upon which all men of all ages may experience salvation. Acts 2:17-21 describes how the last days open and how they close.

ITS THEME 2:22-36

Jesus of Nazareth: His Accreditation 2:22

" 'Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know — . . . ' "

First, Peter makes a plea. *Listen to these words* is not a meaningless address. It anticipates an objection. Peter is saying, "Hear me out!" Second, he focuses on Jesus the Nazarene. This is a favorite design-

nation used by the apostles (Acts 3:6, 4:10, 6:14, 10:38, 22:8, and 26:9). Nazareth was an obscure town and a despised province—a “town of infamy.” The apostles loved to proclaim that Jesus reigns by the name that should condemn Him to obscurity. Finally, Peter introduces the proof that Jesus is Messiah and Savior. The participle *approved by God* in the perfect tense shows completion and finality. The divine approval of Jesus is demonstrated objectively through His miracles. Those who observed the miracles of Jesus understood them in one of two ways. Some understood them to be performed by divine power; others understood them to be performed by Satanic power. No one, however, considered them to be fraudulent!

Jesus of Nazareth: His Death 2:23

“ ‘...this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.’ ”

The Divine Side of Jesus’ Death

Every aspect of it was the manifestation of divine plan. The words *delivered up* may refer to the act of God or the act of Judas, but context strongly favors the former. Even if it refers to the act of Judas, it was still part of the predetermined plan of God.

The Human Side of Jesus’ Death

Divine sovereignty does not mitigate human guilt, and the guilt was that of both the Romans and the Jews. The words *godless men* are literally *lawless men*. Jewish literature refers to the Romans as *he-reshaim*, “the wicked,” and the Roman Empire as *malkuth he-reshaim*, “the kingdom of the wicked.” While the act of crucifixion was carried out by the Romans, it was instigated by the Jews.

Jesus of Nazareth: His Resurrection 2:24-32

Its Reason 2:24

“ ‘And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.’ ”

The sentence that was passed by the Jews and executed by the Romans is reversed by God in the resurrection of Jesus. The divine court overrules the human court; the court of God reverses the court of Caesar.

Verses 23 and 24 introduce one of Peter’s favorite contrasts. It is the contrast of the way men treated Jesus with the way God the Father treated Him—You killed Him, but God raised Him! Notice this motif in Acts 2:36, 3:14-15, 4:10, 5:30-31, and 10:39-40. Man took God’s Son and killed God’s Son; God gave His Son and God raised His Son. God had the first word, and God had the last word! These sets of contrast present a powerful lesson: Salvation is in Jesus Christ; all man could do was contribute his sin.

Why was death unable to hold Him? First, there is a physical reason. He could not be held by death because He was God. Death is a condition inconsistent with deity (I Timothy 6:16). Death could not be a permanent condition of Jesus the God-Man. Second, there is a moral reason. Jesus was sinless and holy, and death is a necessary result of sin. His perfect moral character demanded the resurrection. There are only two possible explanations of the death of Jesus. First, He died because He was personally sinful and thus deserved, as do all sinners, to die. The impeccability of Jesus rejects this explanation. Second, He died because He was a sinless substitute for sinful men. This in truth is the gospel.

Its Prophecy 2:25-28

" 'For David says of Him, "I was always beholding the Lord in my presence; for He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. ²⁶Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue exulted; moreover my flesh also will abide in hope; ²⁷because Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, nor allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay. ²⁸Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; Thou wilt make me full of gladness with Thy presence." ' "

The prophecy is taken from Psalm 16:8-11. Special interest is found in the words "Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades (the grave)." How could David expect God to keep him from the grave and from undergoing decay? This leads to the interpretation of the psalm.

Its Interpretation 2:29-32

" 'Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰And so, because he was a prophet, and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants upon his throne, ³¹he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay. ³²This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.' "

These verses assume two things: David is dead, and Scripture is true. David's tomb is proof that he is dead, and Peter's hearers can find it to the south of the city of Jerusalem, near Siloam. How, then, can the promise that he would see neither death nor corruption be true? David was speaking prophetically; and the words apply to another, namely, the Messiah and thus to Jesus.

The reference made to Psalm 110:1 in Acts 2:34-35 shows that David knew the promise would be fulfilled in one of his descendants. Mark 12:35-37 shows that Jesus interpreted the Psalm as a reference to Himself.

Jesus of Nazareth: His Ascension 2:33

“ Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.”

It Involves a New Glory

This summarizes the activity of Jesus from His ascension to the Day of Pentecost. The participle *having been exalted* is from the Greek verb *hupsoo*, which means *to lift up*. In places such as John 8:28 and 12:32-33, it is used to describe His lifting up in crucifixion. In Acts 2:33, the verb describes His being lifted up in glory to the Father’s right hand. Jesus was lifted up on the cross, and Jesus was lifted up into heaven.

Philippians 2:8-9 shows the relationship of the two “liftings.” Because Jesus suffered death on the cross, God highly exalted Him. The verb translated *highly exalted* is *hupsoo* with a preposition as a prefix, which serves to intensify the meaning of the verb.

The new glory involves a new position at the Father’s right hand. Until the ascension, the career of Christ consisted of His pre-incarnate state, His birth, His life, His death, His burial, and His resurrection. His ascension initiates a new phase in His career called His session. This is the term used to designate Jesus’ position between His seating at the Father’s right hand and His return, which lies in the future. With His session, believers begin the wait for His return (I Thessalonians 1:9-10).

It Involves a New Presence

The Holy Spirit is described as *poured forth*, which conveys the idea of lavish bestowal. The Holy Spirit was sent forth from the ascended Christ.

Jesus of Nazareth: His Office 2:34-36

“ For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand,³⁵ until I make Mine enemies a footstool for Thy feet.’ ”³⁶ Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.”

When Psalm 110:1 says “the Lord” spoke to “my Lord,” it is obvious that two “Lords” are involved. Acts 2:34-35 identifies the second as Jesus. God the Father was speaking to God the Son.

Once again Peter presents his favorite antithesis, i.e., the way God treated Jesus and the way man treated Him. Peter proclaims that Jesus is both deity (*Lord*) and Messiah (*Christ*). The word translated *certain* stands first in the sentence in order to emphasize absolute certainty. This is the only place in the New Testament where we have the words *all the house of Israel*.

ITS OUTCOME 2:37-40

Relative to the Crowd 2:37

"Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?' "

This verse shows the cause-effect relationship between the preaching of the word and personal conviction. The word order of the Greek is this: "... this Jesus whom you crucified. Having heard, they were pierced." The nation had crucified the very Messiah promised to them in their own Scriptures. They obviously need a change of mind, and this is what Peter is about to tell them.

Relative to the Apostles 2:38-40

"And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself.' ⁴⁰And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation!'" "

Peter replies to the crowd with two imperative mood verbs, *repent* and *be baptized*. There is an interesting and significant difference between the two commands, however. The command to repent is second person plural; the command to be baptized is first person singular. Since Greek did not use commas, periods, semi-colons, etc., they had a kind of syntactical punctuation. The different personal endings of these two verbs set up a sequential order. Repent first; be baptized second. The New American Standard Bible shows this by placing a comma after the first verb. The command is *repent; after this has been done, be baptized*.

Where does the prepositional phrase *for the forgiveness of your sins* fit? There are several options grammatically. First, it may attach only to the verb *repent*. The meaning therefore would be this: Repent for the forgiveness of your sins, and then be baptized. Second, it may attach to both, meaning repentance and baptism are both prerequisites for forgiveness. Grammar alone does not settle the question beyond doubt.

Scripture should always be interpreted harmonistically. This means that no passage should be understood in a way that contradicts another passage. It is also true that difficult passages should be interpreted in light of clear passages. Acts 2:38 is admittedly a difficult passage and should be taken in a way that harmonizes with the rest of the Bible on the subject of how one receives forgiveness of sins.

I believe the most viable interpretation of Acts 2:38 is to connect *for the forgiveness of your sins* with the verb *repent* only. Support for this view is found by going elsewhere in the preaching of Peter (the

same man who spoke the words of Acts 2:38) to see if forgiveness of sins is associated with baptism. Acts 10:43 is such a passage, "...of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins." Forgiveness is offered on the condition of faith, which is the consistent teaching of the New Testament.

The Holy Spirit is described as a *gift*. The word is *dorean*, and the lexical meanings given are *without payment, gratis, undeservedly, without reason*. An interesting usage of the word is found in John 15:25 where we read, "But they have done this in order that the word may be fulfilled that is written in their Law, 'They hated Me *without a cause*.'" The words *without a cause* translate *dorean*.

Verse 39 points to the age long nature of the promise of the Spirit. This rests ultimately in the prophetic word of Joel (Acts 2:21). The word *far off* is never used temporally in either the New Testament or the Septuagint. It is always used spatially. Understood this way, those who are *far off* are those away from Jerusalem and would cover the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem and ultimately to Rome in Acts 28.

Verse 40 points to the intensity of the teaching in the early church. The word translated *solemnly testified* is the normal word for *witness*, which is *martureo* plus an intensifying preposition. The normal word for *exhorting* is *kaleo*, but here another preposition is attached to it showing intense activity.

The church of Acts 2 had not yet been acclimatized to the world. The world was viewed as perverse, using the Greek word *skolios* that means to be *crooked*.

ITS RESULTS 2:41-47

Initial Results 2:41-42

The Growth of the Church 2:41

"So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls."

The early church functioned in a simple way—God's word was proclaimed, men listened, and the church grew. The church put forth no other effort to increase its number. Unfortunately, the history of the church that follows is one of a declining priority on the word of God.

The Occupation of the Church 2:42

"And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

Four activities of the church form two sets of couplets. The first set refers to teaching and fellowship and is connected with the min-

istry of the apostles. The second set involves the breaking of bread and prayers. This verse is the first of several summary statements found throughout Acts pertaining to the progress of the church. These statements roughly approximate five year periods. The summary statements are Acts 2:42, 6:7, 9:31, 12:24, 19:20, and 20:31.

The Ongoing Results 2:43-47

"And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. ⁴⁴And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; ⁴⁵and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. ⁴⁶And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, ⁴⁷praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."

The miracle working of the apostles did two things. First, it identified them with the ministry of Jesus (Acts 2:22). Second, it authenticated their apostolic ministry (II Corinthians 12:12). The spiritual unity of early believers expressed itself in communal living. This was all done voluntarily and stands in total contrast to the redistribution of wealth by the state as in socialism and communism. It will eventuate in the tragedy of Ananias and Sapphira. See Acts 5 for a discussion of the concepts found here. The words *the Lord* stand emphatic in verse 47—it was His church, and its members were placed there by Him.

The Newborn Church

or "Popularity to Prison"

Acts 3:1-4:31

THE OUTLINE

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THE COMMENTARY

The day of Pentecost is past, and we now enter the early history of the church. Three fundamental features of early church life must be remembered. First, the church was destined to reach the world with the gospel. Acts 1:8 had spoken of the apostles as “My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” Acts records the history of the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem in the east to Imperial Rome in the west. Second, the church was enjoying the favor of all who lived in Jerusalem (Acts 2:47). The following chapters will show how this favor comes to an end with the arrest of the apostles and the eventual persecution that drives all Christians from Jerusalem (Acts 8:1-2). Third, the church was growing numerically (Acts 4:4). People were believing the gospel by the thousands!

Acts 3:1-4:31 advances past Pentecost and the events associated with it, recording Peter’s second sermon and the events that follow. As Acts 2 closes, we find new believers gathering continually in the temple (2:42, 46). The church is permeated with a sense of awe and wonder over the miracles of the apostles (2:43), and Acts 3:1-10 records one of these miracles in some detail. Finally, as on the day of Pentecost, Peter seizes the opportunity to preach the gospel to the gathered masses of Jews (Acts 3:11-20).

The sermon ends in the same way as Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost, for “many of those who heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to about five thousand (Acts 4:4).” The results of this sermon, however, distinguish themselves from that of the day of Pentecost in a significant way, for the short vignette of Acts 4:1-3 tells us Peter and John were arrested and put in jail.

To attain the goal of Acts 1:8, the church must be spread; to be spread, she must be scattered; to be scattered, she must undergo great persecution. The arrest of Peter is the first event leading to the dispersion of Christians from Jerusalem as recorded in Acts 8.

PETER: HIS CREDENTIALS 3:1-10

The Setting 3:1-2

Centering About a Jewish Practice 3:1

“Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer.”

The major points of the outline extending from Acts 3:1-4:31 focus on Peter because he is the predominant speaker and actor. This does not disparage John, however, for he was Peter's fellow apostle. The two men are inseparable in these verses, but Peter is unquestionably the leader. Peter and John were inseparable from the time Jesus commissioned them to prepare for the last Passover, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it (Luke 22:8)." Cephas (Peter) and John were called "pillar apostles" by Paul in Galatians 2:9.

Acts 2:43 speaks of the *wonders and signs* that were taking place through the apostles. Why does Luke select this one particular miracle for detailed treatment? Several reasons may be proposed. First, the miracle was one of great magnitude and publicity. While this is true, it seems more probable that it was chosen because of the part it plays in the early history of the church. It was the occasion for one of Peter's great discourses and also precipitates the first hostile movement toward the church.

The verb *going up* to the temple or to Jerusalem is a common expression in the Gospels. Since the temple was on a height, it infers location; and since it was the place of worship, it infers reverence. Peter and John were probably ascending the terraces that led to the temple court.

The outer court was not part of the sacred temple area and could be traversed by Gentiles. It is thus called the Court of the Gentiles. Leaving the Court of the Gentiles, one ascended steps that formed a barrier between the outer court and the inner court. Notices were posted in both Latin and Greek warning the Gentile to proceed no further on the penalty of death. The Beautiful Gate was probably one of nine that led through the barrier. Passing through these gates, one arrived at the Court of Women, so called because the Jewish women could proceed no further into the temple. Jewish laymen could pass this court and go further into the Court of Israel. Beyond this was the Court of the Priests. Within this court stood the sanctuary itself with its two compartments, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies.

The occasion for the journey to the temple was the *hour of prayer*. The early church continued to adhere to the institutions and forms of worship in Israel. The Jews held 6:00 A.M. to be the first hour of the day and thus the ninth hour would be 3:00 P.M. It must be borne in mind that Acts is a transitional book, and the church will be slowly weaned away from Jewish practices. The first dramatic example is found in Acts 10:9-16 where a sheet containing animals forbidden as food by the Old Testament is lowered to Peter. He is told to eat; he resists the suggestion and is rebuked by God for so doing.

Many early Christians refused to relinquish certain Jewish practices, and they are corrected and rebuked in New Testament books such as Galatians and Hebrews.

Centering About a Lame Man 3:2

“And a certain man who had been lame from his mother’s womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple.”

Neither Luke nor Peter mention the name of the man who was healed. Luke refers to him as a *certain man* (Acts 3:2), and Peter refers to the man as *him* (Acts 3:12). Both Peter and Luke wish to divert attention from both themselves and the man who was healed; they wish to focus on Jesus, the Messiah.

The man’s condition was congenital (*from his mother’s womb*) and familiar, for he was placed at the same spot *every day*. The people knew the man and his condition very well. His known condition will demonstrate the certainty and the greatness of the miracle. The imperfect verb *was being carried along* means the action was simultaneous with the *going up* of Peter and John.

The word *lame* is found fourteen times in the New Testament. In eleven of the fourteen references, blindness is also mentioned. Only in Acts 3:2 and 14:8 is lameness the only condition mentioned, and in both cases it was congenital. Typically, those brought to Jesus for healing were the crippled, blind, and lame. The man’s condition is further defined as pertaining to his feet and ankles (Acts 3:7). Acts 4:22 tells us the man was over forty years of age, which means he must have witnessed Jesus’ teaching in the temple.

The lame man was placed at an intersection of heavy traffic to *beg alms*. In Judaism, alms giving was classified as a meritorious act, one that gained divine approval and blessing. This strategic placement gave those entering the temple an opportunity to gain merit—at least so they believed. Those who placed him there utilized Jewish legalistic mentality to insure a full cup of alms. Added to this would be the devotional feelings that would be present among those who came to pray.

The Dialogue 3:3-6

The Man 3:3

“And when he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms.”

The lame man was on the lookout for temple worshipers who might be good prospects for alms, and Peter and John seemed to be of that type. The imperfect tense of the verb *asking* shows that his request was repeated and probably fervent. He was specific about what he wanted them to do—he wanted *alms*.

Peter 3:4

“And Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze upon him and said, ‘Look at us!’ ”

The words *fixed his gaze* translate the same verb translated *were gazing intently* in Acts 1:10. One can imagine the intense look of the disciples as Jesus ascended into heaven. This is the same look that Peter gave the lame man. Such an intense look would serve to rivet the man's attention on Peter, and the words *look at us* serve the same purpose. They would also tend to raise the man's expectations.

The Man 3:5

"And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them."

This is the second time Luke has focused on the lame man's expectations. This prepares for the contrast between what the man desires and what Peter has to give.

Peter 3:6

"But Peter said, '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!' "

The verb *possess* means *to have at one's disposal*. This implies that Peter had no silver or gold nor did he have a source from which he might obtain it. Peter disappointed both the man's request and the man's expectation. In verse 3 he had *asked* for silver and gold; in verse 5 he had *expected* silver and gold; now, Peter says, "I have none!"

What do the words *in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene* mean? In Semitic thought, a name does not merely identify or distinguish a person but is meant to say something about their nature and character. Power was present in the name of Jesus.

The designation of Jesus as a *Nazarene* was a title of denigration, for both Nazareth and Nazarenes were held in utmost contempt. Why, then, did the apostles use it? Because they wished to emphasize that He who is despised of men is honored by God; He from whom men would naturally expect nothing is the "King of Kings and Lord of Lords."

It is said that Thomas Aquinas once called upon Pope Innocent II while he was counting money. Pope Innocent said, "You see, Thomas, the church can no longer say, 'Silver and gold have I none.' " Aquinas is said to have replied, "True, Holy Father, and neither can she now say, 'Arise and walk.' " Peter understood a vital truth: The mission of the church is not temporal but eternal, not material but spiritual.

The simple command *walk* is significant. The imperative mood shows that Peter is appealing to the man's will. Never before had the lame man thought of walking as a matter of choice. The man had to be utterly shaken! The present tense of the command denotes continuous activity, and the intensive pronoun attached to the verb means *keep on walking all around*.

The Miracle 3:7-8

"And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. ⁸And with a leap, he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God."

Peter suited his action to the word he had spoken. Peter said, "Walk," and then extended his hand to help the man to his feet. In the miracles of Jesus, a healing word was often accompanied by an act or gesture (Matthew 8:15, 9:25, 14:31, 20:34). The gesture served to connect the miracle with the one who performed it. This was true of Peter, focusing on his apostolic credentials.

The word *immediately* is an adverb that should be connected with both the verb *raised up* and the verb *were strengthened*. The healing was an instantaneous one! This is a favorite word of Luke. When the angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias and announced the birth of a son who was to be named John, Zacharias responded with wonder and doubt and was rendered speechless "until the day when these things take place (Luke 1:20)." Upon the birth of the child, Zacharias, still unable to speak, was given a tablet on which to write the child's name; and we are told he began to speak "at once." Luke was highly impressed with the instantaneous nature of Jesus' healings. See the same word in Luke 4:39, 5:25 (translated *at once*), 8:44, 47, 55; 13:18, 18:43.

The man *leaped up*, demonstrating by alternating slow and fast motion of his limbs that he was truly healed. John 4:14 uses the same word of "a well of water springing up to eternal life." The word *walk* matches Peter's command perfectly. It is *peripatei*, which may by form be either imperative or indicative. It is imperative in verse 6; it is indicative in verse 8. The imperative anticipates the walk; the indicative reports the walk.

The Response 3:9-10

Observing His Present 3:9

"And all the people saw him walking and praising God..."

The presence of a large number of people provides many eyewitness testimonies to the healing of the lame man. The words *all the people* refer to the Jewish population of Jerusalem.

Observing His Past 3:10

"...and they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him".

The major point of this verse is the unquestioned identity of the man who was healed. The verb *taking note* is *epiginosko*. The intensive pronoun attached to the verb meaning *to know* carries two

ideas. First, it points to full knowledge; and second, it points to accurate knowledge.

Isaiah had spoken of the coming of the Messiah as a time when "the lame will leap like a deer...(Isaiah 35:6)." When John needed assurance that Jesus was the Messiah, he sent two of his own disciples to Jesus to ask, "Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?" Jesus sent them back to John with a message saying, "Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk...(Luke 7:20-22)."

The crowd is now gathered, and the continuing work of Jesus the Messiah is about to be corroborated by the healing of the lame man by Peter and John. With this authentication, Peter seizes the opportunity to the preach the gospel.

PETER: HIS SERMON 3:11-26

The Structure of the Sermon

After acquainting us with the setting for the message in Acts 3:11, Luke moves into Peter's words in the second half of verse 12. Verses 12-16 provide the explanation of the healing; verses 17-26 tell the gathered multitude what they must do in light of their rejection of Jesus as Messiah. The emphasis in these verses is on application. Each section is put together in a logical manner with the structure as follows.

The Explanation of the Healing 3:12-16

THE MIRACLE: NEGATIVE EXPLANATION 3:12-15

- God Glorified Jesus 3:13a
 - You Delivered Him 3:13b
 - You Disowned Him 3:13c-14a
 - You Asked for Another 3:14b
 - You Killed Him 3:15a
- God Raised Jesus 3:15b

THE MIRACLE: POSITIVE EXPLANATION 3:16

The negative explanation of verse 12 matches the positive explanation of verse 16. The divine act of glorification in verse 13a matches the divine act of resurrection in 15b. In between these divine acts, Peter uses four aorist tense verbs to describe the actions of the nation.

The Application to the Nation 3:17-26

The structure of these verses is exhibited in its alternation pattern. First, a prophecy is quoted followed by the appropriate application of it to the hearers.

THE FIRST CYCLE OF APPLICATION 3:17-20

- The Prophecy of Christ's Death 3:17-18
- The Exhortation to Repent 3:19-20

THE SECOND CYCLE OF APPLICATION 3:21-23

- The Prophecy of Christ's Rule 3:21-22
- The Warning of Destruction 3:23

THE THIRD CYCLE OF APPLICATION 3:24-26

- The Prophecy of Christ's Salvation 3:24-25
- The Promise of Blessing 3:26

The Setting 3:11

"And while he was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them at the so-called Portico of Solomon, full of amazement."

Why was the healed man clinging to Peter and John? Two common answers are given to this question. Some say the clinging indicated his very deep sense of gratefulness for what they had done for him. It would be unreasonable to say that this is not correct. On the other hand, some feel that he may have feared relapse and wanted the apostles to be available for a "second healing." There is, however, no indication in the text that this may have been the case and should be set aside as imagination, not interpretation.

Other usage of the word translated *clinging* helps shed light on the explanation of his action. The word is commonly used for police arrest. It is translated *arrest* in Matthew 14:3, *seize* in 21:46 and 26:48. The man simply did not want the apostles to leave, and he was willing to use all the force needed to detain them. He had found miracle workers and did not wish to lose (or loose) them.

Solomon's porch was a covered walkway along the east side of the temple. It was about forty-five feet wide with columns about thirty-seven feet high. The word translated *portico* is *stoa* and means *colonnade* such as were attached to the Greek temples. The Greek philosophers often used them as places of instruction; and one school of philosophers derives its name from them, i.e., the Stoics. According to John 10:22-23, it was frequented by Jesus in the winter time.

The single word translated *full of amazement* placed as the last word in the sentence shows that the wonder caused by the miracle had not abated but was, in fact, at its climactic point. It is upon recognition of this state of wonder that Peter opens his address to them all.

The Explanation 3:12-16

The Miracle: Its Negative Explanation 3:12

"But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people, 'Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk?'"

Peter does not address his audience as “you people” but as *Men of Israel*. By so doing, he is associating all those present with the national guilt accrued by the crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus was proclaimed by the prophets of Israel; He was born of the seed of Abraham, the father of Israel; and Peter wants to remind his listeners that they are members of that nation.

The reference of the words *at this* is a little ambiguous. The pronoun may be neuter and thus mean *at this thing (miracle)*, or it may be masculine and mean *at this man*. On the other hand, it is hardly possible to separate the two.

Peter does not deny that power or piety has accounted for the miracle; he denies that it was *their own* power or piety. It was nothing inherent or meritorious that brought about the healing. This stands in contrast to those such as Simon who astonished the people at Samaria claiming to be someone great and was called the Great Power of God (Acts 8:9-10).

The Treatment of Jesus: By God the Father and By Israel the Nation 3:13-15

“ ‘The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our Fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered up, and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. ¹⁴But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses.’ ”

Peter’s sermon begins and ends with a reference to Jesus as *His* (God the Father’s) *Servant* (3:13, 26). The word translated *servant* is used for both son and servant—4:46-53 illustrates the former; Acts 4:25, the latter. The word describes both servile and filial relationships.

The mention of Jesus as God’s servant takes us back to the “servant songs” of Isaiah. The four “songs” are Isaiah 42:1-7, 49:1-7, 50:4-9, and the well-known Isaiah 52:13-53:12. Jewish interpretation often takes the servant of Isaiah to be the nation of Israel itself. While God speaks of “My Servant, Israel” in Isaiah 49:3, one should not overlook the fact that the servant in Isaiah 49:5 is said to be the savior of Israel; and in 49:7, the servant is the one despised by Israel. The servant songs of Isaiah are Messianic in character, anticipating one who will be the epitome of all that God chose Israel to be.

Four verbs describe how the nation treated Jesus: *delivered up*, *disowned*, *asked for*, and *put to death*. They are each aorist tense and describe a definite event. Even more noteworthy is the person and number of each—second person plural. The plural views the whole nation as participating in the actions described by the verb. National guilt is truly the theme.

Each of the four verbs is worthy of special attention. The first is *delivered up* (*paradidomi*), which is used consistently in the Gospel accounts to describe the action of Judas. It is found in Matthew 10:4 (*betrayed*), in 26:16 (*betray*), in 26:21 (*will betray*), in 26:46 (*betrays*) and in 27:3 (*betrayed*). When Peter uses the same verb, he uses the second person plural, treating the act of Judas as the act of the entire nation.

The second verb is *disowned*, which is repeated twice. John 19:15 describes the specific instant of denial. "Pilate said to them, 'Shall I crucify your king?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar.' " The crime is made particularly heinous when seen as committed in the face of Pilate's decision to release Him. The verb form of the infinitive *to release* is *apoluo*, which is the very word placed in Pilate's mouth in Luke 23:16 saying, "I will therefore punish Him and release (*apoluo*) Him."

The third verb is *asked for*. This deepens the guilt of the nation because the one they rejected was the Messiah, and the one they desired was a murderer. Not only did the nation demand the death of the innocent but asked for the acquittal of the guilty. Matthew 27:21 and John 18:39-40 give us the historical account.

Finally, we are told they *put* (Him) *to death*. The irony of the situation may be grasped by noting the meaning of the word translated *Prince*. It is *archagos*, which means *originator, author*. The regal flavor added by the translation *Prince* is not justified by context. The word is found in Hebrews 2:10 and 12:2 rightly translated *author*. The insanity of man's sin is obvious: Mortal men put to death the author of life!

The motif found in the preaching of the apostles appears once again in the divine reversal of the human court by the resurrection of Jesus.

The Miracle: Its Positive Explanation 3:16

" 'And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all.' "

To many Jews, *the name* was a surrogate for God. It connoted His power and presence. In the Bible, a name is more than a designation; it is a description. The power of the name of Jesus lies in the person so described, not in merely uttering the proper noun.

The reality of the miracle is stressed by three things. The words *whom you see and know* describe the notoriety of the case; the words *this perfect health* point to the completeness of the man's restoration; and the words *in the presence of you all* stress the public nature of the healing.

Jesus is presented as both the object and the source of faith. The phrase *in His name* uses the preposition *epi*, which introduces the basis upon which the faith rests; the phrase *through Him* uses the preposition *dia* and indicates the agency or the means of the faith.

The Application 3:17-26

Focus on Jesus' Death 3:17-20

ITS PREDICTION 3:17-18

“ ‘And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. ¹⁸But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled.’ ”

The words *and now* represent a common formula for doing one of two things. Sometimes they are used to indicate a transition to a new topic. When used this way, we could paraphrase, “Now, moving on to the next subject for discussion...” At other times, they are used to introduce the application of what has just been said. This is the use here in Acts 3:17. Peter is saying, “And now, since you are guilty of killing your Messiah, what hope is there for you?”

When Peter asserts that the nation acted *in ignorance*, he is not intending to mitigate the guilt of Israel; he is attempting to explain the guilt of the nation. When Jesus was being crucified, He said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” This does not mean that ignorance is the grounds for forgiveness, but rather that it is the grounds for granting opportunity to hear the message of forgiveness. This same crowd for whom Jesus prayed when He was dying is addressed by Acts 2:38 saying, “Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins...” and likewise in Acts 3:19 “Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away....”

The individuals of the nation must change their minds as to the identity of Jesus. The first part of verse 18 is general and alludes to the words of the prophets *announced beforehand*. This is the translation of a single word *prokatangelo*, a compound made up of *angelo*, *to announce*; *kata*, an intensive pronoun meaning *fully*; and *pro*, meaning *before*. It is used also in Acts 7:52 (translated *previously announced*).

The prophets spoke specifically of the truth that “Christ should suffer.” The word *suffer* is a common New Testament idiom for dying (Luke 22:15, Acts 17:3, Hebrews 9:26, 13:12).

The aorist tense verb *has...fulfilled* points to the specific historical fulfillment of the prophecies concerning Messianic suffering. This has all been fulfilled in Jesus, thus identifying Him with the predicted Messiah.

ITS REQUIREMENT 3:19-20

“ ‘Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; ²⁰and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you...’ ”

The imperative verb *repent* means *to change one's mind*, an appropriate action in the light of the nation's recent rejection of Jesus as Messiah. All they had to do to avail themselves of salvation was change their former attitude toward Jesus and bring it into line with God's attitude toward His Son. God's verdict concerning Jesus was the resurrection; they must turn to Him in complete agreement concerning Jesus.

The verb *wiped away* is a word that may mean *obliterate* and was used of the cancellation of a debt. A third century papyrus reads “that epistle which you sent I was not able to read because of the wiping out.” This alludes to the common practice of erasing a papyrus sheet so that it might be used for other purposes. In the New Testament it is used of something God does for His own in the present and for what He will do for them in the future. In the present it is used to describe forgiveness of sin and debt (Acts 3:19, Colossians 2:14 translated *canceled out*). In the future it is used to describe the removal of all sorrow and pain (Revelation 7:17, 21:4).

The *times of refreshing* is more fully defined in verse 21 as the *period of restoration of all things*. If the reference to the refreshing is eschatological in nature, then what does Peter mean by the sending of Jesus? The most natural interpretation would indicate that those who recently crucified Jesus have an opportunity once again to receive Him. If they do so, they will receive forgiveness of sins; and Christ will return to establish His kingdom. Verse 20 transitions to the theme of Christ's return and reign.

Focus on Jesus' Return and Rule 3:21-23

THE PROPHECY 3:21-22

“ ‘...whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. ²²Moses said, “The Lord God shall raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed in everything He says to you.” ’ ”

Verse 21 introduces a chronology not found in verse 20. There is to be an interim between His ascension into heaven and the *period of restoration*, which is defined as the time when all the words of the Old Testament prophets will be fulfilled. The verb *must* indicates that Christ's stay in heaven is imperative.

The primary reference of Deuteronomy 18:15-20, which Peter quotes here in part, is to the institution of the prophets in Israel. The prophet spoken of has Messianic overtones, however, as may be seen by John 1:19-21, 25; 6:14; and 7:40.

THE WARNING 3:23

“ ‘ “And it shall be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.” ’ ”

Assuming Jesus to be the *prophet* spoken of by Moses, the warning about His rejection is now applied by Peter. Verse 23 shows how necessary the repentance called for in verse 19 is. It also shows that true belief in Moses will lead to belief in the Messiahship of Jesus. Belief in Jesus as Messiah is in complete harmony with the words of Moses. While the religious leaders saw Jesus as a contradiction of Moses, Peter presents Him as the confirmation and fulfillment of Moses.

Focus on Jesus' Salvation 3:24-26

“ ‘ And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days. ²⁵It is you who are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, “And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” ²⁶For you first, God raised up His Servant, and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.’ ”

To believe in Jesus as the Messiah is to believe the message of all the prophets (3:24); to believe in Jesus as the Messiah is to believe the covenant God made with Abraham (3:25).

Peter begins to make a pointed application to his hearers in verse 25. The pronoun *you* is emphatic, both by form and position. The words *sons of the prophets* and *sons of the covenant* do not point to literal descendancy. The words assign their relationship to Old Testament prophecies; they had hereditary interest and intimate relationship to the prophecies that pointed to Jesus.

With the words *for you first*, Peter adds one more compelling reason why they are responsible for their response to Jesus—the message came to them first! Peter's sermon ends with an offer of God's free grace: You rejected Jesus for a murderer—you rejected the Messiah—but even now you may change your view of Him and be saved!

PETER: HIS ARREST 4:1-4**The Outcome of the Sermon: The Religious Aspect 4:1-3*****The Jewish Intervention 4:1***

“And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees, came upon them.”

Acts 3 ends with Peter's words “from your wicked ways.” He probably intended to say more, but the temple police interrupted as he was speaking.

The captain of the temple guard was the chief of police. He stood next in rank to the high priest and was the final authority for main-

taining order in the temple. The priests, a select group of Levites, were his officers. The Sadducees were descendants of the Hasmoneans and looked back to Mattathias, Judas, Jonathan, and Simon as those who inaugurated the messianic age. They objected to all teaching concerning angels, demons, and the resurrection.

The arrest of Peter and John marks the first official persecution of the young church. The persecution is first limited to the arrest of these two but will eventually reach to all of the apostles (Acts 5:17-18) and then the entire church (Acts 8:1-2).

The Jewish Objection 4:2

"...being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead."

The strong reaction of the Sadducees shows how clearly, cogently, and forcefully Peter had proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus. The Sadducees were infuriated for two reasons. First, Peter and John were teaching. This activity was seen as a threat to the status quo—Sadducees, not common men, were the accepted teachers of Israel. It was not the miracle but the act of teaching that angered them. They do not say, "Don't heal!"; they say, "Don't teach!" Second, they were angry because Peter made Jesus a proof for the resurrection of the dead.

The Jewish Incarceration 4:3

"And they laid hands on them, and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening."

The apostles were put in prison for safekeeping rather than as a punishment. By Jewish law, one must be made aware of the consequences of his crime before being punished for it. The common people were to be given legal admonition in the presence of witnesses. They could only be punished for their crime if they repeated it after due warning. Those with rabbinic training were presumed to know the legal consequences of their actions. The apostles were incarcerated in preparation for the gathering of the Sanhedrin the next morning.

The Outcome of the Sermon: The Spiritual Aspect 4:4

"But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand."

The messenger can be restrained; the message cannot. This was probably the principle Luke had in mind when he placed the statement about the apostles' imprisonment before a statement about spiritual results of Peter's preaching. Paul states the same principle in II Timothy 2:9 saying, "I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal, but the word of God is not imprisoned."

The message is literally the word. The hearing-believing sequence is an important part of New Testament doctrine (Acts 10:43-44, Galatians 3:2).

PETER: HIS TRIAL 4:5-12

The Question 4:5-7

"And it came about on the next day, that their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; ⁶and Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent. ⁷And when they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, 'By what power, or in what name, have you done this?' "

The rulers, elders, and scribes comprise what is called the Sanhedrin, the high court of Israel. Our translation gives us *Council* consistently (Acts 4:15; 5:21, 27, 34, 41). The Romans allowed the Jews to have jurisdiction in non-capital cases, though the Sanhedrin advised the Roman court in such cases. However, if a verdict of death was reached, they could not execute it without Roman approval. We meet the Sanhedrin fourteen times in Acts, and in each instance it stands in opposition to the church.

The pronoun *you* found in the question asked of Peter is emphatic. It carries the flavor of disdain and means "people like you!"

The Defense 4:8-12

The Power of Jesus 4:8-10

"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers and elders of the people, ⁹if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, ¹⁰let 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.' "

Peter's situation reflects the words spoken by Jesus in Luke 21:12-15 where Jesus tells the disciples of five things that lay in their future. First, persecution will come from their own nation (21:12a). Second, this persecution will revolve about Jesus' name (21:12b). Third, it will present them with great opportunity (21:13). Fourth, they are not to prepare their defense beforehand (21:14). Fifth, Jesus promised to give them words that cannot be refuted. Peter's situation, his attitude, and his message fit Jesus' words perfectly.

The participle *filled* denotes a special filling for the occasion. It is different from the use of the adjective *full* to denote the character of a Spirit-filled man as found in Acts 6:5.

The Identity of Jesus 4:11

“ ‘He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the very corner stone.’ ”

Peter quotes from Psalm 118:22. The word *corner* is *kephala* and means *head*. When used of things, it means *the uppermost part, the extremity, the end*. It referred to either the foundation stone or the capstone.

The Salvation of Jesus 4:12

“ ‘And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.’ ”

Peter now moves from the issue of healing to the issue of salvation. He does not say, “There is healing in no one else.” He uses three emphatic negatives. The Greek runs something like, “There is not in another, not salvation, no other name.” He also uses the two Greek words for *other*. The first is translated *no one else* and means *another in terms of number*; the second is translated *other* and means *another in terms of kind*. There is no Savior in addition to Him, and there is no Savior like Him.

In asserting the necessity of finding salvation in Christ alone, Peter uses the same word that Jesus directed to Nicodemus in saying, “You must be born again.”

PETER: HIS COURAGE 4:13-22

The Deliberations of the Sanhedrin 4:13-20

Their Observations 4:13-14

CONCERNING PETER AND JOHN 4:13

“Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.”

The observations of the Sanhedrin begin with their response to Peter’s preaching. Acts 2:37 records the response of the Jewish masses to the preaching of Peter as they inquire as to what they should do. Acts 4:4 tells us that many of the Jews came to believe. The Sanhedrin stands in complete contrast, for they show no acceptance of guilt concerning the death of Jesus; there is no sense of alarm or inquiry as to what they should do. Their only response is wonder (4:13) and anxiety (4:17). The gospel saw its success among the common people, not the religious leaders.

The Sanhedrin sees three things in Peter and John. First, it sees their confident bearing. The word *confidence* carries the ideas of boldness, freedom, and forthrightness. This quality stands as the antithesis to hesitation or reserve. Second, they note their common status. The word *uneducated* is *agrammatos* and means *unable to write, illiterate*.

Literacy was high among the Jews, but they had a special belief that theological discussion required rabbinic training—Peter and John had none of this. Those who had no such training were called “Am haeretz”—people of the land. Third, they observed their companionship with Jesus. Peter’s teaching and argumentation reminded them of that of Jesus.

CONCERNING THE LAME MAN 4:14

“And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply.”

The miracles of Jesus and the apostles are unimpeachable. Even their bitterest enemies admit the reality of the miracles. The Greek is dramatic in this verse—“seeing the man with them—standing (perfect tense)-healed (perfect tense).”

The words *to say in reply* translate the single Greek word *antilego*, meaning literally *to speak against*. This is the same word translated *refute* in Luke 21:15. Even the miraculous cannot cure a heart of stubborn unbelief.

Their Discussion 4:15-17

THE DILEMMA 4:15-16

“But when they had ordered them to go aside out of the Council, they began to confer with one another,¹⁶ saying, ‘What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.’ ”

That the Sanhedrin knew they could not deny the miracle is eloquent testimony to its authenticity. It would have been very convenient to charge the apostles with fraud, but this was out of the question. No law had been broken, so there was no legal guilt. Because of their popularity with the people, it would be impolitic to punish them. On the other hand, to set them free to go on teaching in the name of Jesus was to invite another incident. The high court thought they had solved a problem by crucifying Jesus; but the resurrection had made the situation worse, and the miracles of the apostles of Jesus were making things worse yet.

THE DECISION 4:17

“ ‘But in order that it may not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to any man in this name.’ ”

Had the miracle been of major concern, they could have said, “Teach all you want but do no more miracles.” But the issue was not the miracles; the issue was the doctrines of Christianity.

Their Confrontation 4:18-20

THE EDICT OF THE COUNCIL 4:18

“And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.”

The edict served a two-fold purpose. First, it was intended to curtail the spread of Christianity by instilling fear in Peter and John. This failed to take into account the kind of men that stood before the Council. Peter and John had been transformed by three powerful factors. First, they had been shaped by their association with Jesus. Second, they had witnessed the resurrection of Jesus. Third, they had experienced the power of the Holy Spirit bestowed on the day of Pentecost.

The second purpose of the edict was to provide a legal basis for further action (5:27-28). The prohibition was put in the form of a command and was comprehensive. It included both public and private teaching and was specific—it forbade teaching in the name of Jesus.

THE REFUSAL OF THE APOSTLES 4:19-20

“But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; ²⁰for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard.’ ”

The apostles viewed every form of authority from a Christocentric perspective. The words of the apostles at this point focus on theory versus practice. In theory, the Sanhedrin would agree that God should be obeyed before man. In practice, they bowed the knee to the tradition and practice of men. The pronoun *we* is emphatic and its force is this: “We have made our decision; now you must make yours.”

The Threat of the Sanhedrin 4:21-22

“And when they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which they might punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened; ²²for the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.”

At this time, individual believers were untouched by persecution. The healing was not an illusion—it was genuine; nor was there collusion among sympathizers to fabricate a healing. Legal precedent was now set for the council to take further action in the future, which they will do.

PETER: HIS REPORT 4:23-31

Scripture Recalled 4:23-26

“And when they had been released, they went to their own companions, and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, ‘O Lord, it is Thou who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them, ²⁵who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Thy servant, didst say, “Why did the Gentiles

rage, and the peoples devise futile things? ²⁷The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ." " "

The response of the church to Peter's report is praise. First, it focuses on God's person. The word translated *Lord* is not the usual *kurios* but is *despotas* (our English word *despot*). It designates God as the absolute sovereign one. Second, it considers His work—He is the sovereign creator God.

The praise is followed by a quotation of Psalm 2:1-2. To be against the Messiah is to be against Yahweh (Jehovah). Since Jesus is the Messiah, the crucifixion was resistance to the one true God.

Scripture Fulfilled 4:27-28

" 'For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur.' "

The fulfillment of the prophecy may be seen by placing the predicted entity side by side with its fulfillment.

GENTILES (nations)	—————→	ROMANS
PEOPLES	—————→	ISRAEL
KINGS	—————→	HEROD
RULERS	—————→	PILATE
HIS ANOINTED	—————→	HIS CHRIST

Other fulfillments of Psalm 2 are found in the New Testament. Reference to Psalm 2:7 is found in Acts 13:33, Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5. Revelation 2:27, 12:5, and 19:15 refer to Psalm 2:9. Acts 2:28 reminds us that the correspondence of prophecy and fulfillment is not fortuitous. Notice also Acts 2:23 and 3:18.

Scripture Proclaimed 4:29-31

" 'And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Thy bond-servants may speak Thy word with all confidence, ³⁰while Thou dost extend Thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Thy holy servant Jesus.' ³¹And 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."

It is notable that the church does not ask for relief. They do not ask God to remove the threats, only to observe them. It is enough to know that God knows. The church saw that the real danger was not in the persecution but in their response to it. The real danger lay in ceasing to proclaim the word of God. They ask God that this may not happen and are dramatically answered in verse 31.

The Display of Unity

or "One Heart and Soul"

Acts 4:32-5:11

THE OUTLINE

- A. The General Display of Unity 4:32-35
 - 1. The Attitude of the Church 4:32
 - 2. The Activity of the Church 4:33-35
- B. The Individual Display of Unity 4:36-5:11
 - 1. The Honest Display 4:36-37
 - 2. The Deceitful Display 5:1-11

THE COMMENTARY

THE GENERAL DISPLAY OF UNITY 4:32-35

The Attitude of the Church 4:32

"And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them."

The expression *heart and soul* is a common Old Testament expression for total devotion of affection and duty (Deuteronomy 6:5, 10:12, 11:13, 30:2, 6, and 10).

How are we to reconcile the idea of private property and common property? The phrase *anything belonging to him* recognizes the right of private property. This is fully supported here and elsewhere in God's word. Peter speaks of the property of Ananias as *your own* and *under your control* in Acts 5:4. The commandment "you shall not steal" assumes the right to own and possess goods. The issue here is not private property *or* common property, but rather private property *and* common property. The theme is how early Christians

viewed their personal possessions. They were not viewed as for their personal use and enjoyment exclusively but were to be shared. This is, in fact, the only way one can truly enjoy possessions.

Economic conditions were generally bad, and they were especially bad for those who had accepted Jesus as the Messiah. Beginning with the famine spoken of in Acts 11:28-30, the church in Jerusalem was in chronic poverty.

The actions of the church stand in complete contrast to both socialism and communism in two ways. First, common property was not due to the action of the state. Second, the surrender of property for common use was voluntary, not forced. The action spoken of here is never commanded in the New Testament.

One of the remarkable things about early Christian generosity is that it occurred during times of persecution and suffering. The surrender of one's coat in summer is not difficult, but the surrender of it in the midst of a snow storm is.

The Activity of the Church 4:33-35

"And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. ³⁴For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, ³⁵and lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need."

The Bestowal of Great Blessing 4:33

Great power was bestowed, and great grace was bestowed. Power was the very thing for which they had prayed in verse 30. This is the second time we have met the word *charis* (grace) in the book of Acts. The first was found in Acts 2:47 where it is translated *favor*. In the first case it was favor of men, but here it is favor with God.

The Demonstration of Great Blessing 4:34-35

The word *for* introduces evidence that great grace was upon them. This describes a period of early church history that will be short-lived. The condition of poverty ensues as may be seen in Acts 11:29, Romans 15:26, and II Corinthians 8:1-2.

The imperfect tense verbs in these two verses are iterative, meaning they did this from time to time. These were voluntary acts of concern done to relieve the distress of poor believers.

THE INDIVIDUAL DISPLAY OF UNITY 4:36-5:11

The Honest Display 4:36-37

"And Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means, Son of Encouragement), ³⁷and who

owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet."

Joseph is "exhibit A" of the kind of generosity spoken of in verses 34-35. The apostles gave him a nickname (Barnabas) to distinguish him from many other Josephs. Barnabas is to become an important figure in Luke's account of the expansion of the church from Jerusalem to Rome (Acts 9:26-27; 11:20-24, 28-30; 13:1-14:28; 15:1-4, 12, 22; and I Corinthians 9:6).

The Deceitful Display 5:1-11

The Plan of Ananias and Sapphira 5:1-2

"But a certain man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, ²and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet."

Ananias is to the church what Achan was to Israel. The Septuagint translates Joshua 7:1 with the same verb found here in the words *kept back*. Under the leadership of Joshua, Israel had experienced victory after victory. That progress was halted until Achan was detected and destroyed. Both Achan and Ananias teach an important lesson: Neither Israel nor the church can be defeated from without, but each could be defeated from within.

The cases of Ananias and Sapphira and of Barnabas are opposite, but all of the externals are the same. The word *property* is the same as that found in Acts 2:45. Ananias and Sapphira acted in the same way and did the same thing as other believers had done. Their sin was not that they did not give all the price but that they *said* they did.

The Rebuke of Peter 5:3-4

"But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land? ⁴While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God.'"

In what sense did Ananias lie? Certainly the lie was not verbal, for he has not said a word as far as we know. Ananias lied by taking personal advantage of a common understanding. To this point, when one sold land, the full price was put at the apostles' feet. The first discipline in the church was upon deceptive actions, performance that was not true to reality.

In referring to the Holy Spirit, Peter views sin in its most fundamental aspect—all sin is against God. Ananias had the right to give all of the proceeds, some of the proceeds, or none of the proceeds; he did not, however, have the right to mislead.

The Discipline of God 5:5-6

“And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came upon all who heard of it. ⁶And the young men arose and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him.”

The verb translated *breathed his last* is used in the New Testament of one struck down by divine judgment (Acts 5:5, 10; 12:23). Twice we are reminded of the salutary effect this judgment had upon all who heard of it (5:5, 11).

The Death of Sapphira 5:7-11

“Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸And Peter responded to her, ‘Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?’ And she said, ‘Yes, that was the price.’ ⁹Then Peter said to her, ‘Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they shall carry you out as well.’ ¹⁰And she fell immediately at his feet, and breathed her last; and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard of these things.”

The dialogue between Peter and Sapphira found in verses 7 and 8 is the clearest explanation of the nature of the sin of the couple. She and her husband had agreed to falsify the price of the land. Ananias and Sapphira were united in their conspiracy and are now united in their judgment. This is the first time in the book of Acts that the word *church* appears. It will be found regularly from this point on.

The Sanhedrin Defied

*or “They Kept Right on Teaching and
Preaching Jesus as the Christ”*

Acts 5:12-42

THE OUTLINE

- A. The Setting for the Second Appearance Before the Sanhedrin 5:12-16
 - 1. The Continued Ministry of the Apostles 5:12a
 - 2. The Continued Unity of the Christians 5:12b
 - 3. The Continued Response of the People 5:13-14
 - 4. The Continued Increase in the Miracles 5:15-16
- B. The Events at the Second Appearance Before the Sanhedrin 5:17-40
 - 1. The Arrest 5:17-18
 - 2. The Delivery 5:19-20
 - 3. The Discovery 5:21-26
 - 4. The Questioning 5:27-28
 - 5. The Reply 5:29-32
 - 6. The Advice 5:33-39
- C. The Outcome of the Second Appearance Before the Sanhedrin 5:40-42
 - 1. Continued Opposition 5:40
 - 2. Continued Joy 5:41
 - 3. Continued Ministry 5:42

THE COMMENTARY

THE SETTING FOR THE SECOND APPEARANCE BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN 5:12-16

These five verses reveal the events that lead to the action of the Sanhedrin in Acts 5:17-18. The ministry of the apostles, as conducted in Acts 5:12-16, results in the attitude of jealousy described in Acts 5:17 and the action of arrest described in Acts 5:18.

The Continued Ministry of the Apostles 5:12a

"And at the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people..."

Peter and John had been previously dismissed by the Sanhedrin with a warning not to speak in Jesus' name (Acts 4:18, 21). The warning and threat did not deter them, however; and they carried on their ministry with even greater fervor and constancy as the continuous action verb shows (5:15-16).

The performance of *signs and wonders* was confined to the apostles, and the imperfect tense verb shows their continuous performance. This is why great emphasis is given to the position of the apostles in these early chapters of Acts. The miracles established them as authoritative teachers and recipients of divine revelation. The apostles were to the church much the same as the prophets were to Israel.

To understand *the people* as a reference to the Jews is the most natural interpretation when biblical usage is considered. On the day of Pentecost, Peter addresses the gathered masses as *Men of Israel* (2:22) and uses the same address in 3:12 but speaks of *all the people of Israel* in 4:10. Jesus is the Messiah and Savior of all men, but the first presentation of this truth is to the Jew.

The Continued Unity of the Christians 5:12b

"...and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico."

Christians continued to meet in the same place where the first arrest had taken place (3:10, 4:3). Solomon's porch was one of the most public places in Jerusalem. The message of Jesus as the Messiah was not "hidden under a bushel" but was boldly and publicly proclaimed.

The Continued Response of the People 5:13-14

"But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem. ¹⁴And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number."

Those Who Admired Christians 5:13

Two events had occurred that engendered fear among the people—first, the warning of the Sanhedrin concerning teaching in Jesus' name (4:18, 21) and, second, the fate of Ananias and Sapphira.

When Luke speaks of *the rest*, he is probably referring to interested but fearful and unbelieving Jews. Christianity earned their respect but not their devotion. The verb *associate* is strong. In Luke 10:11 it is translated *clings* in reference to the dust on the disciples' feet. Its strength is forcefully displayed in Matthew 19:5 where Jesus alludes to Genesis 2:24, saying, "For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." Here the verb describes the marriage relationship and is translated *cleave*.

Those Who Became Christians 5:14

The words *all the more* translate *mallon*, which normally means *rather*. It implies a contrast between what one might expect and what actually happens. Due to the action of the Sanhedrin, one would expect a decrease in the number of those added to the church; but instead, there was an increase.

The Continued Increase in the Miracles 5:15-16

"...to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets, and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. ¹⁶And also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits; and they were all being healed."

The words *to such an extent* translate the Greek connective *hoste*, which is normally used to introduce results. The placing of the sick in the streets for healing is conceived of as a result—but a result of what? Some connect the result clause with the first half of verse 12, meaning that the outpouring into the streets is the result of the many miracles performed by the apostles. Others connect it to verse 13 and treat the result clause as an expression of the high esteem in which the apostles were held. It seems best to make the connection with the immediately preceding context. As a result of the many conversions, there were many healings. The growing church attracted many to the apostles for healing.

The sick were from both local and remote distances. The desire to be in the shadow of Peter must be similar to the desire to touch the garment of Jesus as we are told in the Gospel accounts. A popular movement was afoot, and the Sanhedrin had to take action to stop it.

THE EVENTS AT THE SECOND APPEARANCE BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN 5:17-40

The Arrest 5:17-18

"But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy;¹⁸ and they laid hands on the apostles, and put them in a public jail."

This is the second arrest, and in both cases the motive is given. In the first, recorded in Acts 4:1-3, the reason is doctrinal, i.e., the apostles are preaching the resurrection using Jesus as an example. In the second, found here in Acts 5:17, the reason is personal—namely, jealousy of the success of the apostles.

The arrest was not a punishment but was for the purpose of detainment for trial the next day. The previous arrest had involved only Peter and John. Now the Sadducees swoop down on the entire apostolic band and will pursue a more severe course of action than before.

Early opposition to Christianity rose from the Sadducees, not the Pharisees. It was the Pharisee Gamaliel who gave the Sanhedrin advice to leave the apostles alone and let things take their own course of action.

The Delivery 5:19-20

"But an angel of the Lord during the night opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said, ²⁰'Go your way, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life.'"

A technical matter needs a little attention at this point. Some of the strongest opposition to the supernatural claims of Scripture has come through "form criticism." There are certain conventional forms in which documents are written. Much of the Pentateuch reflects the Hittite "suzerainty treaties" between the king and those he ruled.

Some speak of the "door" miracles of the ancient world. This refers to accounts of the opening of prison doors under divine instigation. *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (3:175) says, "The threefold repetition of the motif of the miraculous opening of prison doors in Acts...and the agreement with ancient parallels in many details, e.g., liberation by night, the role of the guards, the falling off of chains, the bursting open of the doors, the shining of bright light, earthquake, all suggest that in form at least Luke is following an established *topos*."

F. F. Bruce, in his commentary on Acts, makes this excellent statement. "In this as in all form-critical studies it must be remembered that the material is more important than the form; meat-pies and mud-pies may be made in pie-dishes of identical shape, but the

identity of the shape is the least important consideration in comparing the two kinds of pies." ICC Acts. p. 120 footnote.

God uses both natural and supernatural means of delivery. In Acts 4:21 the means was natural; the Sanhedrin released Peter and John because no legal charge could be lodged against them. Here in Acts 5:19 the means is supernatural, for it is an *angel of the Lord* that releases the apostles from jail. That this miraculous deliverance was not effected for the apostles' own relief is proved by the words of verse 20 commanding them to enter the temple and begin teaching. Continued ministry, not apostolic relief, is the motif. The angelic command was to preach, not in private but *in the temple*; not to the leaders but to *the people*.

The words of the angel revolve around three action words, *go...stand...speak*. The verb *go* is a present imperative, meaning *leave here and get moving toward the temple*. The participle *stand* accompanies the imperative verb *speak*. We could translate *having taken your stand, speak*. The implication of standing is the resistance they may encounter in the delivery of their message concerning Jesus. The words *whole message* underscore the full proclamation of the message in the face of the opposition of the Sanhedrin.

The words *this Life* may allude back to Acts 3:15, which spoke of the action of the Jews toward Jesus *in put(ing) to death the Prince (author) of Life*. The NASB has capitalized the word *Life*, perhaps indicating that it should be taken to refer to Jesus Himself. Jesus as the personification of life is common in the New Testament. On the other hand, life and salvation are usually synonymous in the New Testament; and both translate the Hebrew word *chayyah*, which would point to the message of life or salvation.

How were the doors of the prison opened without the guards knowing it? Perhaps the answer lies in the night setting, or there could have been a supernatural numbing of their senses. A similar phenomenon is recorded in Luke 24:16. In that context, when Jesus approaches two disciples on the Emmaus road, they fail to recognize Him; and Luke says, "...their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him." This apparently alludes to a divine action that prevented their perception of Jesus.

The Discovery 5:21-26

Of the Apostles' Absence 5:21-23

"And upon hearing this, they entered into the temple about daybreak, and began to teach. Now when the high priest and his associates had come, they called the Council together, even all the Senate of the sons of Israel, and sent orders to the prison house for them to be brought. ²²But the officers who came did not find them in the prison; and they returned, and reported back, ²³saying, 'We found the prison house locked quite securely and the guards standing at the doors; but when we had opened up, we found no one inside.'"

Why does Luke give such a full description of the Sanhedrin? Why does he inform us that this was *all the Senate of the sons of Israel*? Luke's intent is to let us know that this is a plenary session, which includes a number of Pharisees. As the advice of Gamaliel will reveal, the presence of the Pharisees played a significant part in the release of the apostles.

When the officers arrive at the prison, everything seems to be in order with one exception—the prisoners are gone! It is not probable that the officers understood this to be a divine intervention. We can be assured that they had a naturalistic interpretation of the event. Perhaps they concluded that the popularity of Jesus had even reached the prison guard, and some inside sympathizers had released the apostles.

Of the Apostles' Presence 5:24-26

"Now when the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them as to what would come of this. ²⁵But someone came and reported to them, 'Behold, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!' ²⁶Then the captain went along with the officers and proceeded to bring them back without violence (for they were afraid of the people, lest they should be stoned.)"

Verse 26 shows the non-resistance typical of early Christians when arrested. Had the apostles resisted, the people would have rioted and stoned the captain and his officers. The apostles did not take this course of action but went quietly. No force was needed because no resistance was encountered. Peter exhorts Christians concerning this attitude of quiet trust in I Peter 1:21-23.

The Questioning 5:27-28

"And when they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. And the high priest questioned them, ²⁸saying, 'We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.'"

The words of the high priest show that legal grounds for punishment now exist. The words *gave...strict orders* are literally *with command we commanded* and stress the clarity and force with which they had spoken. The only concern of the Sanhedrin was the preservation of its own authority and reputation. Their contempt for Jesus is expressed in the reference to Him as *this man*.

The verb *intend* implies design and plan as well as desire. To bring blood upon one's head is to make one responsible for the death of another. By refusing to accept responsibility for the death of Jesus, the words spoken by the crowds in Matthew 27:24-26 may be recalled, "His blood be on us and on our children!"

The Reply 5:29-32

We Will Obey 5:29-31

"But Peter and the apostles answered and said, 'We must obey God rather than men.' ³⁰The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. ³¹He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.' "

The words of the high priest at the first trial had reminded them of their orders; Peter's words now remind the high priest of their response to those orders. Peter is saying, "We remember your words, do you remember ours?"

Once again Peter introduces the antithesis which is a keynote in all his preaching. How God treated Jesus is set in contrast to how Israel treated Him. This theme is found in Acts 2:23-24, 36; 3:13, 15; 4:10, and here.

THE MESSAGE ABOUT JESUS CONCERNS HIS RESURRECTION

The reference to *our fathers* links Peter and his listeners together as believing the same Old Testament Scriptures. It also points to the compatibility of Jesus with the Old Testament, which contrasts the Jewish view that sees Him as a contradiction of the Old Testament. The words of Peter are a reaffirmation of what they have been consistently teaching.

THE MESSAGE ABOUT JESUS CONCERNS HIS CRUCIFIXION

The means of Jesus' death was *hanging Him on a cross*, which is a locution for crucifixion. It is used of the cross of Jesus in Acts 10:39, 13:29; Galatians 3:13; I Peter 2:24.

The antithesis between the treatment of Jesus by God and the treatment of Jesus by man is the keynote of Peter's preaching. Note the antithesis in Acts 2:23-24, 36; 3:13, 15; 4:10 and here.

THE MESSAGE ABOUT JESUS CONCERNS HIS GLORIFICATION

Does the verb *exalted* refer to the same act as *raised* in verse 30? It is possible that *raised* refers to the raising up of Jesus as prophet and king in Israel. Acts 3:26 says, "For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you...."

The words *He is the one* are emphatic—He is the very one! Once again, antithesis is Peter's theme.

THE MESSAGE ABOUT JESUS CONCERNS HIS SALVATION

The words *to give repentance* probably mean *to give time for repentance*, as is expressed in II Peter 3:9, which speaks of the patience of the Lord that is intended to provide time "for all to come to repentance." The infinitive *to come* is *choreo*, which means *to make room for something*. Here the "room" refers to time.

The reference to Israel is not meant to restrict the message of the gospel to that nation only. It is intended to emphasize the priority of opportunity that was granted to Israel.

Repentance, which means *a change of mind*, is the means of forgiveness, which in turn is the purpose of Peter's message to Israel. All of this expresses the purpose of Jesus' exaltation—to be Prince and Savior.

We Are Witnesses 5:32

" 'And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.' "

The witness of the apostles is identical to the witness of the Holy Spirit. All true witness is co-witness. The apostles were not witnesses on the basis of their own individual initiative; they were witnesses under divine direction. Jesus had spoken to the disciples concerning the coming of the Holy Spirit saying, "He will bear witness of Me, and you will bear witness also, because you have been with Me from the beginning (John 15:26-27)." The apostles were so aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church that they regarded themselves as His organs of expression.

The word *obey* is *peitho*, which means *to convince or persuade*. It points to required obedience to rightful authority.

The Advice 5:33-39

Its Setting 5:33

"But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and were intending to slay them."

The Sanhedrin regarded themselves as being held in contempt; and their anger overcame reason, a point which Gamaliel will stress at the opening of his speech. Their intention to slay the apostles can mean one of two things. First, it could mean that they were ready to file capital punishment charges and turn the apostles over to the Roman government. Second, it is possible that they were ready to pick up stones and slay the apostles on the spot. This will happen later in the case of Stephen. The fierce passion of the Sanhedrin is occasion for Gamaliel, a Pharisee, to rise and make his plea.

While the Sadducees were the majority party, they could not make a move against the apostles without the consent of the Pharisees who enjoyed the popular support of the people. This explains their caution in arresting them as is noted in verse 26.

The Speech of Gamaliel 5:34-39

HIS IDENTITY 5:34

"But a certain Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time."

Present at the meeting of the Sanhedrin was Gamaliel, a Pharisee of great eminence. A disciple of Hillel, Gamaliel was highly revered as demonstrated by a well-known statement in the Mishnah which says, "Since Rabban Gamaliel the Elder died there has been no more reverence for the Law, and purity and abstinence died out at the same time." According to Acts 22:3, one of his students was the illustrious Saul, soon to become Paul the apostle.

HIS THEME 5:35

"And he said to them, 'Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men.' "

The verb *take care* translates *prosecho*, which means *to hold your mind on or for yourself*. We might paraphrase saying, "Don't let emotion rule; act intelligently, not emotionally!" The word *propose* is *mello*, which means *to be about to do or say something*. John 4:47 shows this force of the word as a royal official says of his son, "he was at the point of (*mello*) death." Death was imminent for the boy, just as rash treatment of the apostles was imminent in Acts 5.

HIS PERSPECTIVE 5:36-37

- The Example of Theudas 5:36

" 'For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody; and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. And he was slain; and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing.' "

The words *some time ago* indicate the case before them is nothing new. The historical example introduced includes the fate of both the leader and the led. Critics have seized on the examples of Theudas and Judas as historical blunders of Luke. For a discussion and refutation of this idea, see *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, (John, Acts), pages 322-323. When Herod the Great died in 4 B.C., many Jewish insurgents rose. Theudas may have been one of this group.

- The Example of Judas 5:37

" 'After this man Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away some people after him, he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered.' "

We know a bit more about Judas of Galilee. He led a revolt in A.D. 6 when Judea had been reduced to the status of a province. A census was made to determine how much annual tribute Judea should contribute. Judas led a revolt saying God alone was Israel's king, and paying taxes to Caesar constituted treason. The revolt was crushed by Rome but lived on in a party known as the Zealots.

HIS APPLICATION 5:38-40A

" 'And so in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action should be of men, it will be overthrown; ³⁹but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God.' ⁴⁰And they took his advice..."

The advice of Gamaliel reflects Pharisaical theological opinion. They believed that if a thing was not of God, left to time, it would die its own death. If, on the other hand, it was of God, one did not want to be found fighting it. This advice is recorded by the word of God without comment as to its truthfulness. Saul, Gamaliel's student, was of an entirely different mind, as his relentless persecution of the church demonstrates (Acts 8:1-3).

Scripture affirms Gamaliel's opinion in the final analysis only. Ultimately, all that opposes God will be destroyed; but movements of error prosper in this present world system. Gamaliel is wrong in the short term but right in the long term.

THE OUTCOME OF THE SECOND APPEARANCE BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN 5:40B-42

Continued Opposition 5:40b

"...and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them to speak no more in the name of Jesus, and then released them."

The worst Sadducean intentions are held back; and instead of slaying the apostles, they flog them. The number of stripes was based on the limitations of Deuteronomy 25:1-3. Paul tells us in II Corinthians 11:24 that he had this experience five times. This was the sort of treatment Jesus had taught his disciples to expect (Matthew 10:16-17).

The apostles are released with a reminder that the prohibition concerning preaching in the name of Jesus remained in force.

Continued Joy 5:41

"So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name."

It is characteristic of the early Christians to rejoice in the midst of circumstances that would naturally elicit opposite emotions. This phenomenon may be explained by the supernatural conduct produced by the Holy Spirit among believers. It also exhibits the enormous esteem and affection that they had for the person of Jesus the Messiah.

Continued Ministry 5:42

"And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ."

The thrust of this verse is to show how the apostles continued doing what they were told precisely not to do. The force of the words spoken in this verse may be seen by comparing them to the prohibitions of the Sanhedrin found in 4:18 and 5:40. The following chart should help us to see this.

ACTS 4:18	ACTS 5:40	ACTS 5:42
"not to speak or teach"	"speak no more"	"kept right on teaching and preaching"
"at all"	"no more"	"And every day, in the temple and from house to house"
"in the name of Jesus" (forbidden)	"in the name of Jesus" (forbidden)	"Jesus as the Christ" (continued)

Early Organization

or “Seven Men of Good Reputation”

Acts 6:1-7

THE OUTLINE

- A. The Problem Stated 6:1
- B. The Instructions Given 6:2-4
- C. The Implementation Effected 6:5-6
- D. The Closing Progress Report 6:7

THE COMMENTARY

THE PROBLEM STATED 6:1

“Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, 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 words *at this time* are an indefinite expression. They may refer to an interval of days, as in Acts 1:15, or one of many years as in Matthew 3:1. They always imply a connection with what precedes and what follows. Here it means while they were engaged in teaching and preaching Jesus as Christ, this problem arose. The previous attempts to deter the apostles from preaching were through warning and threat. Now the approach is to lessen the preaching of the word through altered priorities.

Acts 6 begins with a new designation for Christians as *disciples*. The word is *mathateuo* and means *learner*. It shows what was going on in the church. Neither the verb nor its noun form occur anywhere past the book of Acts. The verb is last found in Acts 14:21 and the noun in Acts 21:16.

The Hellenistic Jews were Jews of the dispersion who spoke Greek and often thought as Greeks. The native Jews were those who

spoke Aramaic and were born in Palestine. The Hellenistic Jews were suspected of being more Greek than Hebrew because of their origin and language. Each group, however, confessed Jesus as the Messiah and therefore had common ground.

The problem revolved about the distribution of food to needy believers and probably had its roots in Acts 4:34-35. The verb *overlooked* does not imply ill will or contempt, but rather neglect that might occur because the Hellenists were less known than the native born women.

THE INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN 6:2-4

"And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, 'It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. ³But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. ⁴But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.' "

The gathering of the disciples together shows two things about the apostles. First, they did not ignore the problem. Second, they did not attempt to assign blame. The word *desirable* refers to anything that is acceptable or pleasing, and here the one to be pleased is God.

The qualifications of those who are to carry out the task of food distribution are of three types. First, *good reputation* refers to their social qualification. Second, *full of the Spirit* points to their spiritual qualification. Third, *wisdom* indicates the practical qualification. In almost every case, *wisdom* denotes the ability to use truth in a practical way. The pronoun *we* comes first in the sentence and is emphatic. It means we apostles in contrast to others. The verb *devote* denotes exclusive attention. The apostles wisely affirm the priority task of the church—the teaching of the word and prayer.

THE IMPLEMENTATION EFFECTED 6:5-6

"And the statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. ⁶And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them."

The spirit of those against whom the complaint was lodged is commendable. The native Hebrews chose seven men who all have Greek names. The laying on of hands signifies several things. First, it was done in order to pronounce a blessing, as in Genesis 48:14. Second, it identified the one making an offering with the offering itself (Leviticus 1:4). Third, it was done in order to commission to an office, as in Numbers 27:23 and here in Acts 6:6.

Two important lessons concerning church organization are found here. First, organization came about as a response to a need. The word translated *task* in verse 3 means *need* or *necessity*. The church

did not organize for the sake of organizing. Second, the church organized in order to preserve the priority of the word of God and prayer. It organized in such a way that the apostles had the freedom and maximum time to spend in prayer and teaching the word.

THE CLOSING PROGRESS REPORT 6:7

“And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.”

The mention of priests coming to the faith is surprising in light of Acts 4:1 where they come to arrest Peter and John; likewise, in Acts 5:17 it is the high priest and his associates (fellow priests) that rise up against the apostles and put them in jail. On the other hand, there were thousands of priests; and Luke tells us that a good number believed that Jesus was truly the Messiah.

The Ministry of Stephen

or "A Servant Preaches Christ"

Acts 6:8-7:60

THE OUTLINE

- A. The Ministry of Stephen 6:8-15
 - 1. His Credentials 6:8
 - 2. His Opponents 6:9-15
- B. The Message of Stephen 7:1-53
 - 1. The Pillars of Judaism 7:1-50
 - 2. Stephen's Indictment of the Nation 7:51-53
- C. The Martyrdom of Stephen 7:54-60
 - 1. The Vision 7:54-56
 - 2. The Rage of the Crowd 7:57-58
 - 3. The Repose of Stephen 7:59-60

THE COMMENTARY

THE MINISTRY OF STEPHEN 6:8-15

To this point in the book of Acts, Christianity had developed within Jewish confines. Those who made up the church were described as disciples in Acts 6:1. These disciples consisted of Hellenistic Jews and native Hebrews. With Acts 6:8, events begin to occur that will move the gospel outside the city of Jerusalem and into Samaria. The issue of the admission of Gentiles apart from Jewish proselyte requirements will not be formally settled until the Jerusalem conference (Acts 15:1-29) after the first missionary journey of Paul (Acts 13:1-14:28).

Luke presents the following events in biographical style with the name of the central person opening each account. Acts 6:8 begins with Stephen, Acts 8:5

with Philip, and Acts 9:1 with Saul. Connected with Stephen is his martyrdom; with Philip, his ministry; and with Saul, his call.

His Credentials 6:8

“And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people.”

Beginning with Acts 6:8, the events described occur without the presence of the apostles. This shows the power of the individual witness of believers such as Stephen who manifested one of the primary characteristics of Christian maturity, i.e, the ability to stand independently.

It is appropriate that Stephen should be introduced at this point since the growth of the church mentioned in verse 7 was promoted by the appointment of the seven. Of these, Stephen and Philip make the most apparent contribution to the expansion of the church.

The word *power* reveals one of the distinctive features of missionary enterprise in the book of Acts—the presence of the Holy Spirit confirming the word of God by miracles. Acts 6:8 is the first instance of a miracle being worked by one other than an apostle. The *grace* spoken of was probably that bestowed on his lips, resulting in wise and irrefutable words, as was also observed in Jesus (Luke 4:22).

Since Stephen was not an apostle, where did he receive his miracle working power? It is possible that the laying on of the hands of the apostles mentioned in Acts 6:6 conveyed with it the ability to work miracles that had been granted to them. If this is true, Stephen might be considered as an “apostolic delegate” of some sort.

Stephen’s ability had a two-fold effect. From the people of Israel, he received favor; among the religious leaders, jealousy and hatred. We are not told the nature of these great wonders and signs but may assume they were similar in character to those performed by the apostles.

His Opponents 6:9-15

Who Attempted to Silence Him by Debate 6:9-10

“But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen. ¹⁰And yet they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.”

The synagogue was a place for the reading and exposition of the Scriptures and probably originated as early as the Babylonian exile. While both the Tabernacle and the Temple were biblically mandated, the synagogue was not. For the Jew in exile, it was a communi-

ty center; and large towns often had several of them. The mention of Cilicia may indicate that this was the synagogue of Paul.

The subject of the debate is not stated but may be inferred from the charges of blasphemy brought against Stephen in Acts 6:11. Stephen's teaching was effective—it could not be refuted. Jesus spoke of opposition that would come to those who honored Him in Luke 21:15 when He said, "I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute." The word *refute* is *anthistami* and is identical to the word *to cope* in Acts 6:10.

Who Attempted to Silence Him by Slander 6:11-15

"Then they secretly induced men to say, 'We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.'¹² And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and dragged him away, and brought him before the Council.¹³ And they put forward false witnesses who said, 'This man incessantly speaks against this holy place, and the Law;¹⁴ for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us.'¹⁵ And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel."

Many attempts to hinder the teaching of God's word are found in Acts. First, Satan attempted to hinder through threats made by the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:17, 21; 5:40). Second, a more subtle attempt was made by diluting priorities in church activity (Acts 6:2). Acts 6:9-10 was an effort to create debate concerning the accuracy of the message. Now, in Acts 6:11-14 the messengers themselves are slandered.

The charge brought against Stephen was particularly deadly because it would infuriate the people of Israel. To this point, the apostles had the general favor of the populace (Acts 5:26); but this charge threatens to change this. Any threat to the temple was a threat to the people in terms of their livelihood and their religious interests.

The false witnesses recall the trials of Jesus (Matthew 26:59-61; Mark 14:55-59). Luke often uses the Greek word *atenizo* (*fixing gaze*) to heighten the dramatic effect of an event as in Acts 1:10; 6:15; 7:55; 10:1-4; 11:6; 13:9; 14:9, and 23:1.

THE MESSAGE OF STEPHEN 7:1-53

Note: Due to the nature of Stephen's speech, we are not printing the entire Bible text. Under each point made by Stephen, you find a portion of the Bible text that supports what he is saying.

Before the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, there were three great pillars of Judaism—the land, the law, and the temple. Stephen presents his sermon within this framework. He proclaims Christianity in terms

of the popular Judaism of his day. His message is therefore Jewish in form but Christian in content.

The First Pillar: The Land 7:2-36

The Jews had no place for Jesus because all blessing was associated with these three pillars. Stephen's address shows that the blessing of God is not confined to the land, the law, and the temple.

God Appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia, not the Land of Palestine 7:2

Stephen appeals to an event of history familiar to every Israelite. Perhaps few had ever attached significance to it; but God first appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia, not in the land that the Jews so revered.

God Initially Gave Abraham No Inheritance in the Land 7:5

After his initial entry into the land, we are told, "He (God) gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground... ." But God, we are told, gave him a promise.

God Was with Joseph in Egypt 7:9

Egypt is mentioned six times in Acts 7:9-16. We are told "the patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. And yet God was with him." This is more evidence that the blessing of God is not confined to the land.

God Saved the Nation from Starvation by Providing Grain Found in Egypt, not the Land 7:12

"But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers there the first time."

God Cared for Moses in Midian, not the Land 7:29

"And at this remark (concerning his murder of an Egyptian) Moses fled, and became an alien in the land of Midian... ."

God Appeared to Moses at Mt. Sinai, not in the Land 7:30

"And after forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in the flame of a burning thorn bush."

God Sent the Deliverer to Egypt, not the Land 7:34

" 'I have certainly seen the oppression of My people in Egypt, and have heard their groans, and I have come down to deliver them: come now, and I will send you to Egypt.' "

The Second Pillar: The Law 7:37-43

Every Jew venerated the Law and Moses, the law-giver. This included Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, Zealots, Apocalypticists,

Hellenists, and Samaritans. Stephen is about to answer the charge made against him in Acts 6:13, i.e., that he spoke “against...the Law.”

Revelation and redemption cannot be limited to the precepts of Moses, for he spoke of one beyond him who would bring revelation to Israel long after Moses. His prophecy said, “ ‘This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, “God shall raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren.” ’ ”

Moses was God’s appointed redeemer, but the nation repudiated him. Acts 7:39 says, “ ‘And our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him, but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt....’ ”

This parallels the way the nation repudiated God’s chosen redeemer, Jesus. Even when Moses was with them and they had the Law and the sacrificial system, they opposed God’s chosen one. The message of this is clear: There is a Savior beyond Moses.

The Third Pillar: The Temple 7:44-50

Stephen’s primary point is to note that God cannot be confined to a building. He quoted the words of Solomon concerning the temple when he said, “The Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands....” The message is clear: There is salvation outside the temple.

Stephen concludes with an indictment of the nation in 7:51-53. The word “stiffnecked” was God’s own characterization of the people of Israel (Exodus 33:5). The contemporary Jewish attitude toward Jesus was the same as their attitude toward all the messengers of God in the past. Joseph’s brothers hated him; Moses was rejected; the prophets were stoned; and now, Jesus has been crucified. Nothing had been learned from the past for they had now committed the horrible sin of killing their Messiah.

THE MARTYRDOM OF STEPHEN 7:54-60

The Vision 7:54-56

“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him. ⁵⁵But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; ⁵⁶and he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’ ”

Stephen had done the unforgivable—he had challenged status quo mentality. Only a few years ago, Jesus stood before the same Sanhedrin charged with blasphemy and said of Himself when asked if He were the Messiah, “ ‘I am; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power....’ ” Stephen’s words now

confirm the position of Jesus in heaven. The Jews had no option but to charge Stephen with blasphemy, just as they did with Jesus.

Throughout the message, Stephen carefully links his listeners to the nation in the Old Testament. Reference to *our fathers* is found nine times. Jesus had talked about the refusal of the nation to realize their likeness to that in the Old Testament (Matthew 23:29-36). Subsequent history will show that Stephen will accomplish more by death than by life. It is his death that triggers the spread of the gospel outside Jerusalem.

Designation of Jesus as the *Son of Man* is significant for two reasons. First, this is its final occurrence in the New Testament. Second, this is the only time it is spoken by someone other than Jesus. It is taken from Daniel 7:13-14 where the universal sovereignty of the Messiah is taught. There was now access to the throne of God through Jesus the Messiah. This made the temple ritual obsolete.

The Rage of the Crowd 7:57-58

"But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears, and they rushed upon him with one impulse."⁵⁸ And when they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him, and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul."

The stoning of Stephen could be the result of two things. First, it could be explained as an act of fury by the Sanhedrin in excess of its jurisdiction. Second, it could be taken as pure mob action. Notice the action packed words describing their attack on Stephen.

Why did they place their robes at the feet of this young man named Saul? Some have held that this proves Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin. The robes were hardly put at his feet only for safekeeping. Saul may have had some official part in the execution of Stephen. The word *young* is used in the literature of the times to designate one anywhere between twenty-four and forty years of age.

The Repose of Stephen 7:59-60

"And they went on stoning Stephen as he called upon the Lord and said, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!'"⁶⁰ And falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them!' And having said this, he fell asleep."

Stephen's words recall the words of Jesus with one major distinction. Jesus addressed God as Father, whereas Stephen addresses God as Jesus. Stephen obviously believed in the deity of Jesus.

The words *he fell asleep* suggest a peaceful death even though it was accompanied by physical agony. The words are an interesting description of a brutal death.

The Persecution of the Church *or "Outreach Begins"*

Acts 8:1-4

THE OUTLINE

- A. The Place 8:1 -2
- B. The Persecutor 8:3
- C. The Proclamation 8:4

THE COMMENTARY

THE PLACE 8:1-2

"And Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ²And some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him."

Acts 8:1-4 does four things. First, it shows how Acts 1:8 is to be carried out. The church will reach the Roman Empire by being scattered through persecution. Second, it introduces Saul who will be the focal point of Acts 9 and the rest of the book. Third, it serves to link Stephen and Philip. Fourth, it shows the transition from the preaching of the apostles to the witness of individual believers.

Why were the apostles an exception to the scattering? Probably because they felt duty bound to remain at their posts. It is also true that popular resentment was directed more to the Hellenistic Jews. Because of the persecution, churches were now to be born in Judea (I Thessalonians 2:14).

THE PERSECUTOR 8:3

"But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison."

The verb *ravaging* was used to describe the physical injury inflicted by the mangling of a wild beast. The extreme zeal of Saul is seen in his active pursuit of Christians, even into their homes.

THE PROCLAMATION 8:4

"Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word."

Fleeing Christians would be forced to explain why they were leaving Jerusalem. In giving an explanation, they would proclaim their beliefs with regard to Jesus. Persecution intended to halt Christianity served rather to further it.

The Ministry of Philip

or "The Word Reaches Samaria"

Acts 8:5-40

THE OUTLINE

- A. The Gospel in Samaria 8:5-25
 - 1. The Response 8:5-8
 - 2. The Occult 8:9-13
 - 3. The Pentecost 8:14-17
 - 4. The Perversion 8:18-24
 - 5. The Return 8:25
- B. The Gospel to the Eunuch 8:26-40
 - 1. The Call 8:26
 - 2. The Circumstances 8:27-29
 - 3. The Dialogue 8:30-35
 - 4. The Baptism 8:36-38
 - 5. The Removal 8:39-40

THE COMMENTARY

THE GOSPEL IN SAMARIA 8:5-25

The Response 8:5-8

"And Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them. ⁶And the multitudes with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing. ⁷For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had

been paralyzed and lame were healed. ⁸And there was much rejoicing in that city."

The geography of the spread of the gospel is found in Acts 1:8. First, it is proclaimed in Jerusalem (Acts 1-7). Next, it spreads to Samaria (Acts 8-9). Finally, it goes to the remotest part of the earth (Acts 10-28). Each of the expansions has its own "Pentecost." The Jewish is found in Acts 2:1-4; the Samaritan, in Acts 8:14-17; the Gentile, in Acts 10:44-46. In each event, the primary issue is relationship to the Holy Spirit.

Three confrontations between Christianity and the occult occur in Acts. The first one is with Simon in Acts 8:9-11; second, with Elymas in Acts 13:8; and finally, with a young slave girl in Acts 16:16.

Acts 8:5 introduces a specific instance of the general witness spoken of in verse 4. It shows how the gospel began to spread outside Jerusalem.

When Philip began proclaiming Christ to the Samaritans, two things were assumed—first, that the Messiah has come and, second, that He is Jesus. Verse 6 shows that the miracles of Jesus and the apostles were not performed merely to relieve distress. They were performed to gain attention for instruction and teaching. The mention of rejoicing in Samaria should remind us of the words of Jesus concerning Samaria found in John 4:35-36.

The Occult 8:9-13

The Prestige of Simon 8:9-11

"Now there was a certain man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city, and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; ¹⁰and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, 'This man is what is called the Great Power of God.' ¹¹And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts."

Simon presents a problem of identity. Is he the Simon of early Christian literature? The post-apostolic writings speak of Simon Magus. Justin Martyr, a Samaritan himself, says all his countrymen regarded him as a god. Ireneus speaks of him, and Hippolytus tells how Simon allowed himself to be buried alive in Rome, promising to rise on the third day. There is no way of being sure if the Simon spoken of here is that man.

The miracles of Simon contrast those of the apostles. He worked wonders to establish his own greatness; the apostles did not. Simon worked wonders to establish his own glory. The apostles suffered for their ministry; Simon gained glory for himself.

The Success of Philip 8:12-13

"But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. ¹³And even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip; and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed."

Why did Simon associate himself with Philip? Perhaps he attached himself to him to maintain his clientele. Verses 18-19 show he hoped to master the secret of Philip's power. Simon shows no desire to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah as did Philip. He seems to be one attracted only by the miracles, perhaps similar to those spoken of by Jesus in John 2:23-25.

The Pentecost 8:14-17

"Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, ¹⁵who came down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit."

The issue was greater than Philip's proclamation and the Samaritans' response. It involved the acceptance of new converts by the church in Jerusalem. This is the reason for the arrival of the Jerusalem apostles.

The chronological sequence of salvation followed by a later receiving of the Holy Spirit has been seized by Roman Catholic sacramentalists as basis for separation between baptism and confirmation. The charismatics often use it as a basis for a second work of grace.

Several observations are in order. The Samaritan Pentecost demonstrates the importance of understanding the transitional nature of Acts. Acts is history, not doctrinal interpretation. While the coming of the Holy Spirit followed the salvation of the Samaritans, this is not the order that the epistles of the New Testament present. The statements concerning justification, sanctification, and glorification are found in Romans. The order established in the epistles is the reception of the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation. Acts is much like the gathering of ingredients for a meal—it tells of the "mixing and stirring" aspect of the preparation. The epistles present the full meal and set everything in logical perspective and chronological order.

The Perversion 8:18-24***Simon's Offer 8:18-19***

"Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, ¹⁹he offered them money, saying, 'Give this

authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.' "

Simon was an enemy of grace. Verse 18 shows his anti-grace method, and verse 19 shows his anti-grace motive. The act of Simon, as recorded in these two verses, is expressed by the English word *simony*. Webster's large unabridged dictionary gives the following definition: "The act of buying or selling ecclesiastical preferment, ecclesiastical pardons, or other things regarded as sacred or spiritual."

What was the thought pattern of Simon? Simon apparently regarded the bestowal of the Holy Spirit as an effective bit of magic. He had seen the Holy Spirit bestowed by the imposition of hands and probably saw the signs that may have accompanied it. He thought, What prestige I could enjoy if this phenomena could be accomplished by the imposition of *my* hands! He had no idea of the spiritual issues involved.

Peter's Rebuke 8:20-23

OF HIS MONETARY OFFER 8:20

"But Peter said to him, 'May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!'"

The word *may* is optative mood, which refers to a wish that can be fulfilled. This is a wish that is based in reality—men can and do perish who have a merit attitude. A literal translation would say, "Your silver with you (accompany you) into destruction (Hell)." The thought is not that Simon was trying to bribe God; the thought is that of purchasing something which by its very nature is free. Simon's request contradicts the word *gift*, which is *dorean* and means *without payment, gratis, undeservedly*.

OF HIS SPIRITUAL CONDITION 8:21

" 'You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.' "

This matter is literally this word. What word? Probably Peter means this point of doctrine—namely, the receiving of the Holy Spirit. The word part means share, and portion carries the idea of participation.

OF HIS MINDSET 8:22-23

" 'Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity.' "

The verb *repent* does two things. First, it shows Simon is not hopeless. Second, it qualifies the denunciation of verse 20. This wickedness specifies the sin as that of legalistic mentality. The word *if* is the introductory particle for a first class conditional sentence, meaning *if, and we assume it to be true*. The word *possible* is *ara*, which is usually translated *therefore*. Here it is used to emphasize

result—*certainly* would capture the idea. The word *intention* is used of evil purpose; our word *plot* contains this idea. Verse 23 describes a long standing condition.

Simon's Response 8:24

"But Simon answered and said, 'Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.'"

Did Simon repent? We do not know; it seems he is only moved by fear, not any desire to relate to truth. He seems unable or unwilling to pray for himself. With his words spoken here, he disappears from the pages of Scripture.

The Return 8:25

"And so, when they had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans."

The words *and so* are transitional and move us on to a new event. The plural *they* refers to Peter and John and perhaps to Philip for at least part of the journey.

THE GOSPEL TO THE EUNUCH 8:26-40

The Call 8:26

"But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, 'Arise and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.' (This is a desert road.)"

These opening words show the special presence and direction of God in this incident. The angel initiated Philip's movement (8:26); he sustained Philip's movement (8:29); and he terminated Philip's movement (8:39). Philip's ministry to a high ranking Egyptian official shows the continuous move of the gospel from Jerusalem.

The Circumstances 8:27-29

"And he arose and went; and behold, there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship. ²⁸And he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹And the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go up and join this chariot.'"

In Ethiopia the king was venerated as the child of the sun. He was regarded as too sacred to discharge the secular functions of royalty; his duties, therefore, were carried out by his mother, who bore the dynastic title of Candace.

The designation *eunuch* in English refers to a castrated male. The word is used in the Septuagint and other Greek writing for high military or political officials, not implying castration as is probably the case here.

The eunuch had been on a religious pilgrimage to Jerusalem, so he may have been a proselyte. If, however, we take the designation *eunuch* to mean he was castrated, then this would not have been possible because of the restriction of Deuteronomy 23:1. Perhaps he was a near proselyte deeply interested in Judaism.

He was returning to Ethiopia with a copy of the prophecy of Isaiah in his possession. His attention was focused on Isaiah 52:13-53:12. Reading in ancient times was rarely done silently, so Philip probably heard him reading aloud.

The scene is full of action. Philip asks his question while he is running alongside the chariot. The question contains a play on words which could be reproduced in English by saying, "Do you read what you are reading?"

The Dialogue 8:30-35

"And when Philip had run up, he heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' ³¹And he said, 'Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?' And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³²Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: 'He was led as a sheep to slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He does not open His mouth. ³³In humiliation His judgment was taken away; who shall relate His generation? For His life is removed from the earth.' ³⁴And the eunuch answered Philip and said, 'Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself, or of someone else?' ³⁵And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him."

As the eunuch read Isaiah 53:7-8, questions rose in his mind concerning the identity of the suffering one of whom the prophet spoke. No one in pre-Christian Judaism had conceived of a personal Messiah who would suffer. An examination of Jewish Messianic literature proves this point. The Targum on the earlier and later prophets interprets the suffering mentioned by Isaiah 52:13-53:12 in one of two ways. It is seen as a reference to the Jewish nation or to the wicked gentile nations. Philip interprets the passage in a way that the eunuch could have heard nowhere else.

The eunuch was open to instruction as the word *guides* reveals. It is a compound word made up of the verb *ago*, which means *to lead*, and the noun *hodos*, which means *way* or *road*.

Philip was aware that the prophets spoke of a suffering Messiah, as were the other apostles (I Peter 1:10-11). Jesus had linked Himself directly to the concept of suffering for the salvation of others (Isaiah 53:11 and Mark 10:45). There is no evidence that between the time of Isaiah and the time of Jesus anyone had identified the suffering servant of Isaiah with the Davidic Messiah of Isaiah 11 or the "Son of Man" of Daniel 7:13. Jesus made that link and thus made Messianic claims.

The link of Jesus to the suffering servant of the Old Testament may be found in His own words in Luke 22:37 where He claims to fulfill Isaiah 53:12. One should also note the words of I Peter 2:22-25 concerning Isaiah 53:4-6, 9, and 12. The question asked by the eunuch was not only his but that of all Jews of his time.

Philip's answer to the eunuch's question was not based entirely on Isaiah 53:7-8. Isaiah was only the beginning point from which he moved to many other Old Testament Scriptures. Philip's answer had both breadth and depth.

The Baptism 8:36-38

"And as they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?'³⁷[And Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.']³⁸ And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water; Philip as well as the eunuch; and he baptized him."

TEXTUAL NOTE: Verse 37 is probably an addition to the original text. There is certainly no reason why it would have been omitted if it had been there in the original. It is also true that *Jesus Christ (ton Iasoun Christon)* is not an expression used by Luke. The earliest manuscript that contains this verse is from the sixth century.

The Removal 8:39-40

"And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch saw him no more, but went on his way rejoicing.⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus; and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities, until he came to Caesarea."

Philip's Departure 8:39

The word *snatched* carries three ideas with it: forceful action, sudden action, and unresisted action. This is the same word that is found in I Thessalonians 4:17 where living believers are to be "caught up...to meet the Lord in the air." The New Testament tells us nothing more of the eunuch, though historically Irenaeus says he became a missionary to the Ethiopians. Philip had a ministry to the maritime region (Acts 8:40), and he is met next some twenty years later in Acts 21:8-9. Luke's primary interest is the recording of events that furthered the advancement of the gospel, not the events that followed them.

Philip's Placement 8:40

Azotus is the Philistine city known as Ashdod. From this place, Philip took the coastal road north, preaching the gospel as he went. He apparently settled down at Caesarea where we find him in Acts 21.

The Call of Paul

or "From Jewish Radical to Gentile Missionary"

Acts 9:1-31

THE OUTLINE

- A. Paul's Encounter with Jesus 9:1-9
 - 1. His Wrath 9:1-2
 - 2. His Journey 9:3-9
- B. Paul's Encounter with Ananias 9:10-19
 - 1. The Instruction for Ananias 9:10-12
 - 2. The Objection of Ananias 9:13-14
 - 3. The Correction of Ananias 9:15-19a
- C. Paul's Encounter with the Jews 9:19b-31
 - 1. In Damascus 9:19b-25
 - 2. In Jerusalem 9:26-31

THE COMMENTARY

Saul is brought into the historical narrative of Acts gradually. He was first introduced as a "young man named Saul" in Acts 7:58. There we are told that the robes of those who were standing by were laid at his feet. This may mean Saul had some official part in the stoning of Stephen. Some say he was a member of the Sanhedrin at this time. This is possible, but not probable or provable. Others say he had some kind of delegated authority, and this is also possible.

Following the stoning of Stephen, Luke informs us that Saul heartily approved of the action of the crowd (Acts 8:1). Acts 8 continues by telling us how Saul ravaged the church (8:3). With the word *now* that opens Acts 9, we return to the activity of Saul. The word *still* marks continuity with the preceding chapters. After Stephen was stoned, Saul believed it was still necessary to

persecute Christians; and after Christians had been expelled from Jerusalem, Saul believed it was still necessary to persecute them. At the end of Acts 9, Saul recedes into the background; and Peter becomes the dominant figure until Acts 13 where Paul becomes central for the rest of the book of Acts. Peter is the focal point in Acts 1-12; Paul in Acts 13-28.

The call of Paul is found three times in Acts: chapters 9, 22, 26. The first account is descriptive, and the second and third are defensive. It is used in Acts 22 in his defense against the Jews; in Acts 26, in his defense against the Romans. Each of the three accounts mentions his divinely given commission to go to the Gentiles.

PAUL'S ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS 9:1-9

His Wrath 9:1-2

"Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, ²and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."

The words *threats* and *murder* are not general terms. The first referred to legal warning; the second, to judicial punishment. How could Saul do this in good conscience? Perhaps he could do this by appealing to passages such as Numbers 25:1-5 or the actions of Phineas recorded in Numbers 25:6-10 and commended in Numbers 25:11-13.

Since some Christians had fled Jerusalem and gone to Damascus, Saul felt it was necessary to extradite them. This is probably the group Saul had in mind, not native citizens of Damascus who may have become Christians. The high priest was head of the Jewish state and was supported by the Roman government in matters such as this. The designation of Christians as followers of *the Way* carries two ideas. First, believers were conscious that they were following the only true path of salvation. Second, this path was taking them to an ultimate destiny. Reference to *the Way* occurs in Acts 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22.

His Journey 9:3-9

On the Road to Damascus 9:3-7

"And it came about that as he journeyed, he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; ⁴and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' ⁵And he said, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, ⁶but rise, and enter the city, and it shall be told you what you must do.' ⁷And the men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but seeing no one."

The event recorded here occurred at mid-day (Acts 22:6, 26:13). There are four major features of the event. First, it was powerful

(9:3-4a). The light is described as *a light from heaven* (9:3), *a very bright light* (22:6), *a light from heaven, brighter than the sun* (26:13). Second, it was revealing (9:4b-5). Jesus taught a great lesson when He told Paul it was He whom he was persecuting. It shows the oneness of Jesus with His followers. It was impossible to persecute them without persecuting Him. Not only does this event reveal the relationship of believers to Jesus, but it also focuses on Paul's problem—*his* relationship to Jesus. Third, the event was awesome (9:7). Fourth, it was sovereign (9:6). Paul was not asked to make a decision; he was told what he was going to do.

To the City of Damascus 9:8-9

"And Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. ⁹And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank."

The dramatic nature of Jesus' appearance is shown by the trauma it produced in Paul who was unable to see or eat or drink for three days! Luke does not elaborate on the contrast between Paul's intended entry into Damascus and his actual entry. This is left to the imagination of the reader.

PAUL'S ENCOUNTER WITH ANANIAS 9:10-19A

The Instruction for Ananias 9:10-12

"Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' And he said, 'Behold, here am I, Lord.' ¹¹And the Lord said to him, 'Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, ¹²and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight.' "

The street named *Straight* was in east-west road and remains to this day as a main thoroughfare in Damascus. The street was as well-known in Damascus as Michigan Avenue is in Chicago.

That Ananias was a disciple shows that the gospel had now gone about 150 miles north of Jerusalem, though we are not told when, where, or how Ananias had become a Christian. That the *Lord* spoken of by Ananias is Jesus is made clear by Acts 9:17 where Ananias tells Paul of the words spoken to him by the *Lord Jesus*. The words *here am I*, when addressed to a superior, denote accessibility and readiness to obey. Prayerful submission marks Saul's transition to his new life.

The Objection of Ananias 9:13-14

"But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Thy saints at Jerusalem; ¹⁴and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon Thy name.' "

It takes no great imagination to identify with Ananias' fears. Three things caused him to be apprehensive. He knew of the persecution in Jerusalem. He also knew of the leading role Paul had played in that persecution. Finally, he knew Paul had arrived in Damascus to carry on the grim work.

The fear and reluctance of Ananias emphasize two things. First, they show how human he was. It was not at all unusual for the great prophets of the Old Testament to have doubts concerning the will of God, especially when it seemed so contrary to what they expected. Second, they show how vitriolic Saul had been and how radically his life had been changed.

The Correction of Ananias 9:15-19a

"But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; ¹⁶for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.' ¹⁷And Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁸And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, ¹⁹and he arose and was baptized; and he took food and was strengthened."

There are important lessons to be learned from the way the Lord responded to Ananias' objection. God's response could have been a "truth without compassion" approach. The Lord could have said, "I told you to arise and go, so do it now, and do it without question." Or He might have said, "Ananias, how dare you question my wisdom in sending you to Paul!" On the other hand, it could have been the "compassion without truth" approach wherein the Lord said, "Okay Ananias, I've requested too much of you. I'll send someone else, but thanks for listening." The Lord's reply to Ananias may be called "truth with compassion." The Lord did not make his fear a spiritual issue. He responded to his objection with reiteration, not rebuke.

The Lord supports Ananias, telling him the following. First, instead of a persecutor, Paul is now *a chosen instrument*. Instead of concern for Israel alone, Paul is now to take Christ's name to the Gentiles. Instead of prominence and personal glory, he will suffer shame for the name of Christ.

There is more we might like to know about this event. What was the community of Christians in Damascus like? Whatever happened to Ananias? Where and how was Saul baptized? We are told

none of these things and therefore should not seek to squeeze more from the text than we are given. We now meet Saul, newly become Paul.

PAUL'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE JEWS 9:19B-31

In Damascus 9:19b-25

The Proclamation 9:19b-22

"Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus, ²⁰and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.' ²¹And all those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, 'Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?' ²²But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ."

Why has Luke given us this preliminary and sketchy report of what followed Paul's call? He has done so to highlight the dramatic character of Paul's change, emphasized by the opening words of verse 20—*and immediately*. Its public nature is shown by his preaching in the synagogue. Its intensity is expressed by the imperfect tense verb *preaching*, which stresses ongoing action. This account also proves the genuine nature of Paul's change.

Three major facts stand out in these verses. First, Paul preached Jesus as the Son of God and the Messiah (9:20, 22). Jesus was God's Son in a special sense (John 5:17-18). Second, the hearers were so astonished that they questioned his identity. Saul had been sent to the Damascus synagogue by human commission to arrest Christians (9:2). Saul arrived at the Damascus synagogue by divine commission to preach Jesus (9:20). Note the contrast of what they thought Saul was going to do and what he actually did. The word *proved* is *sumbibazo*, which literally means *to put together*. It is used figuratively to mean *unite, knit together* (Acts 16:10, 19:30-33). Paul knitted together the life and words of Jesus with the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. The third major fact of these verses is the persecution that he once headed is now turned against him.

The Plot 9:23-25

"And when many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him, ²⁴but their plot became known to Saul. And they were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death; ²⁵but his disciples took him by night, and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket."

The words *when many days had elapsed* should be put together with Paul's statement in Galatians 1:18 telling of his first visit to Jerusalem three years after his conversion. The incident of being lowered over the wall in a basket should also be understood in

connection with II Corinthians 11:32-33. With this humbling experience, Paul heads for Jerusalem.

In Jerusalem 9:26-31

“And when he had come to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. ²⁷But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸And he was with them moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews; but they were attempting to put him to death. ³⁰But when the brethren learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus. ³¹So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and, going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.”

When Paul entered Jerusalem, he found himself in a difficult position. His old friends knew of his defection and offered no friendly welcome. The Christians with whom he now wished to associate had not forgotten his campaign of persecution. How were they to know this was not a scheme to entrap them?

When Paul needed a friend in Damascus, God provided Ananias; now when he needed a friend in Jerusalem, God provided Barnabas. God often used friends to encourage and support Paul. When Paul was in Macedonia in the midst of pressure, God provided encouragement through Titus (II Corinthians 7:5-7). God gave help through Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25, 27) and the whole Philippian church (2:15-16).

Acts 9:31 is a summary statement for this period of history in the church. The word *church* in the singular stresses its unity—believers in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee all formed one body.

Advancement and Continuation

or “The Gospel Reaches the Gentile”

Acts 9:32-12:25

THE OUTLINE

- A. The Advancement of the Gospel 9:32-11:30
 - 1. In the Maritime Plain 9:32-43
 - 2. In Caesarea 10:1-48
 - 3. In Jerusalem 11:1-18
 - 4. In Antioch 11:19-30
- B. The Continuation of the Gospel 12:1-25
 - 1. The Delivery of Peter 12:1-19
 - 2. The Death of Herod 12:20-25

THE COMMENTARY

The historical block extending from Acts 9:32-12:24 contains three episodes of advancement (Acts 9:32-11:30) and two episodes of continuation (Acts 12:1-23). While the gospel advances beyond Jerusalem, Luke wants to remind his readers that God is not through with Jerusalem. Therefore, chapter 12 is concerned with the blessing of God on the church at Jerusalem and focuses on the delivery of Peter and the death of Agrippa.

THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE GOSPEL 9:32-11:30

In the Maritime Plain 9:32-43

In Lydda 9:32-35

“Now it came about that as Peter was traveling through all those parts, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda.”³³ And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years, for he

was paralyzed. ³⁴And Peter said to him, 'Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; arise, and make your bed.' And immediately he arose. ³⁵And all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord."

The occasion for this advancement of the gospel was a special tour made by Peter. The word *traveling* means *to pass through*; our English word *touring* expresses the idea very well. The translation *those parts* makes the tour seem random. This is not the case, for Peter went to places where there were believers. It would be better to translate "all those places where there were known believers." The last half of verse 32 supports this interpretation.

Where was Lydda, and how did some of its residents become Christians? It was located about twenty-five miles northwest of Jerusalem, a little less than ten miles from the Mediterranean coastline. They may have become Christians because of the persecution triggered by Stephen's death (Acts 8:4). It is also possible that they became Christians through the preaching of Philip (Acts 8:40).

The healing of Aeneas is unusual for two reasons. First, Peter does not name himself as the intermediate agent in the healing. Second, Peter does not evoke the name of Jesus as was done in Acts 3:6-7. With a present tense verb, Peter assures Aeneas of what Jesus the Messiah is going to do for him.

The results represent what a miracle was intended to do. The action of the two verbs *they saw* and *they turned* is simultaneous. The event at Lydda had enormous evangelistic impact on the whole maritime area.

In Joppa 9:36-43

THE DEATH 9:36-37

"Now in Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha (which translated in Greek is called Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity, which she continually did. ³⁷And it came about at that time that she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her body, they laid it in an upper room."

Joppa was the ancient seaport for Jerusalem. Through it, Solomon brought cedar beams to build the temple (II Chronicles 2:16); and it was from here that Jonah fled the presence of the Lord and embarked for Tarshish (Jonah 1:3).

Dorcas must have been a very noteworthy Christian. The word *disciple* is in the feminine gender—the only occurrence in the New Testament.

THE REQUEST 9:38-39

"And since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him, entreating him, 'Do not delay to come to us.' ³⁹And Peter arose and went with them. And when he had come, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood beside him

weeping, and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them."

The friends of Dorcas apparently expected Peter to raise her. Though Jesus had commissioned the disciples to raise the dead, we have no recorded instance of the exercise of this power until now. They had washed the body according to Jewish requirement but had not anointed it, showing that the burial had not been completed. The word *showing* in the middle voice implies that each displayed an item made for them by Dorcas. The imperfect tense of the verb *used to make* could imply that she was actually still in the process of making them when she was stricken and died.

THE RAISING 9:40-43

"But Peter sent them all out and knelt down and prayed, and turning to the body, he said, 'Tabitha, arise.' And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. ⁴¹And he gave her his hand and raised her up; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive.⁴² And it became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.⁴³ And it came about that he stayed many days in Joppa with a certain tanner, Simon."

The description of the raising of Dorcas is similar to the raising of Jairus's daughter. In Mark 5:41 we are told that Jesus said, "Talitha kum" (Aramaic); and here in Acts 9:40 Peter says, "Tabitha kum"; only one letter is different from the words spoken by Jesus.

Verse 42 tells us Luke records this event because of its great evangelistic impact. The stay of Peter with Simon the tanner is a significant preface to chapter 10. The rabbis considered tanning an unclean trade. Peter's stay shows that he was not over scrupulous in the keeping of Jewish traditions. This feature of his lifestyle prepares him for the dramatic events that follow in Acts 10.

In Caesarea 10:1-11:18

The time has now come for the gospel to be presented to the Gentiles directly. The importance of this great event is evidenced by the space that Luke devotes to it—sixty-six verses. Three major matters are placed in the forefront in Luke's account of the entry of the Gentiles into the church.

- The Strong Resistance of the Jewish Church to the Entry of the Gentiles

The early church was made up of Jewish converts who objected to direct evangelization of the Gentiles and their full acceptance into the church on non-Jewish terms. Peter registers his first objection to the setting aside of Jewish practice when the sheet is let down from heaven containing both clean and unclean foods, and he is told to *Kill and eat!* He responds that he has never eaten unclean food. As he addresses Cornelius and his gentile friends, he tells them his presence among them is *unlawful* because a Jew is not to *associate with a foreigner or visit him*.

Having taken the gospel to a gentile household, Peter faces immediate opposition from the Jews in the Jerusalem church as recorded in Acts 11:1-3. Peter had to learn and the Jerusalem church had to learn that God was now opening the way of salvation to the Gentiles apart from Jewish rite and practice.

- **The Proof that It Was None Other than God Himself Who Brought the Gentiles into the Church**

Divine action is seen in sending Peter to the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:3), in God's command to Peter to receive them without hesitation (10:19-20), and in the spontaneous coming of the Holy Spirit upon those who heard the gospel in the house of Cornelius (10:44-46).

- **Final Acceptance of the Gentiles into the Church Apart from Judaism**

After debate, this conclusion is formally stated in Acts 11:18. It is important to understand that Acts 10:1-11:16 is a chronicle of events leading to this conclusion.

Acts 10 records one of the greatest events of the New Testament—the placing of Jew and Gentile on equal footing in one body. All through the Old Testament the focus was on God's chosen people, Israel. This did not preclude Gentile salvation, but one was required to relate to God through Israel. The same was true during the earthly ministry of Jesus. When the disciples were sent out, they were told, "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:5-6)." When a gentile woman came to Jesus asking for mercy, He told her, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

The cleavage between Jew and Gentile was enormous! The very company of a Gentile defiled a Jew; their food was an abomination, and their religion was blasphemous. This is the setting for the event of Acts 10.

The Visions of Preparation 10:1-16

THE PREPARATION OF CORNELIUS 10:1-8

- **His Identity 10:1**

"Now there was a certain man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort..."

Caesarea was located on the Mediterranean seacoast about sixty-five miles northwest of Jerusalem and was named for Augustus Caesar, the heir of Julius Caesar. In New Testament times, it was the place from which Rome administered Palestine.

The first Gentile with whom Jesus had dealings was a centurion. Matthew 8:5-10 tells of the meeting: Jesus makes favorable comment concerning him saying, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel." Every centurion met by

Jesus is cast in favorable light. Cornelius was of the Italian cohort, a detachment of six hundred men. A centurion was commander over one hundred of them. He was the backbone of the Roman army. The historian Polybius speaks of the centurion saying, "Centurions are required not to be bold and adventurous so much as good leaders, of steady and prudent mind, not prone to take the offensive or start fighting wantonly, but able when overwhelmed and hard pressed to stand fast and die at their post." That Cornelius was a centurion makes him clearly Roman and unmistakably Gentile.

•His Religion 10:2

"...a devout man, and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people, and prayed to God continually."

Cornelius is described as *devout* from the Jewish point of view. He was a good moral unbeliever, words that distinguish him from the typical pagan Gentile. The expressions that follow describe his devoutness.

He was a God-fearer. Many Gentiles, though not prepared to enter the Jewish community as proselytes, were attracted to Judaism by two things: the simple monotheism and high ethical standards of the Jews. As a result of this attraction, many attended the synagogue, knew the prayers and Scripture lessons, and observed Jewish practices such as Sabbath observance and hours of prayer.

God-fearers are important from here on in Acts because they will form the nucleus of the Christian community in city after city where Paul took the gospel.

•His Vision 10:3-6

"About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in to him, and said to him, 'Cornelius!' ⁴And fixing his gaze upon him and being much alarmed, he said, 'What is it, Lord?' And he said to him, 'Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God. ⁵And now dispatch some men to Joppa, and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter; ⁶he is staying with a certain tanner named Simon, whose house is by the sea.' "

Cornelius was probably seeking knowledge concerning salvation. We may assume this to be true by observing God's response to him. He sent Cornelius the message that he needed in order to be saved. The precise nature of that message is found in 10:34-43.

The prayers of Cornelius are called a *memorial*. The primary meaning of this word refers to the faculty of memory. The angel is saying that God has taken note of Cornelius's attitude and actions.

Considering the enormous chasm between Jew and Gentile, the possibility of Peter coming to Cornelius on his own would have been out of the question. Since the angel tells him that Peter is in the home of Simon the tanner, Cornelius could have been encouraged since this vocation was considered unclean by the Jews.

Cornelius does not call for Peter on his own; he does so under the influence of revelation and instruction from God. This is not so much a man reaching out as it is God reaching down and sending him in the direction he needs to go in order to hear the message of salvation.

• His Expedition 10:7-8

"And when the angel who was speaking to him had departed, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who were in constant attendance upon him,⁸ and after he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa."

Cornelius surrounded himself with people of like mind, the soldier being described as *devout* also. The participle *explained* is the Greek word from which we get the word *exegesis*. An instructive sequence is involved. First, there had been a revelation from God. Second, that revelation had come in words. Third, the communication of what that revelation contained is called *exegesis*.

THE PREPARATION OF PETER 10:9-16

• The Setting of the Vision 10:9-10

"And on the next day, as they were on their way, and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray.¹⁰ And he became hungry, and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance..."

While the men sent by Cornelius were on the way, the events of verses 9-16 transpire. Peter was apparently observing the Jewish hours of prayer. It was customary to pray three times a day—at morning, noon, and evening. This practice may be based on David's words in Psalm 55:17, "Evening and morning and at noon, I will complain and murmur, and He will hear my voice."

Peter needs to be prepared for the arrival of the three Gentiles dispatched by Cornelius because most orthodox Jews would not enter the dwelling of a Gentile. Perhaps Peter's presence in the home of a tanner shows that he was not overly strict on the matter. Peter's hunger was a common, everyday occurrence that will be utilized by God to teach Peter a great spiritual lesson.

• The Content of the Vision—the Sheet, the Voice, and the Objection 10:11-14

"...and he beheld the sky opened up, and a certain object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four comers to the ground,¹² and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air.¹³ And a voice came to him, 'Arise, Peter, kill and eat!' ¹⁴But Peter said, 'By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean.'"

Peter had always observed the dietary restrictions of Leviticus 11. Quadrupeds were of two classes, the clean and the unclean.

Leviticus distinguishes between those that chewed the cud and had cloven hoofs and those that did not.

It is often assumed that the sheet that God let down was filled with unclean foods only. This is not true, for we are told there were *all* kinds of food in it. What bothered Peter was the lack of distinction between that which was clean and that which was unclean. This will expand from a lesson about foods to a lesson about men as he preaches the gospel in the house of Cornelius.

Peter was surprised at what he saw but was doubtless astounded over what he heard. God's order for Peter to *arise* implies he was lying down or on his knees or sitting; or it could be used figuratively of the need to rouse himself from a previous condition of inaction. The double imperative recognizes none of the traditional distinctions among foods, and Peter is shocked.

It was not unusual for Peter to rebuke the Lord for what He told him to do. Matthew 16:22 and John 13:8 are good examples.

Peter finds himself in a dilemma. In the first place, the regulations of Leviticus 11 were from God, as was the command of Acts 10:13. Two options lie before him: God is contradicting Himself, or God is contravening something old to be replaced by something new. It is the latter that proves to be the case.

• The Reinforcement of the Vision by Voice and by Act 10:15-16

"And again a voice came to him a second time, 'What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.'¹⁶ And this happened three times; and immediately the object was taken up into the sky."

These wonders thunder forth a concept that Peter must learn—a change has taken place! Peter is learning of the abolition of Jewish ceremonial law, with special reference to food laws. He is about to learn more, however. He will discover that the range is far wider than food laws. It will include the removal of the Jew-Gentile barrier (Ephesians 2:14).

The repetition shows God's intent to impress a fact on Peter's mind indelibly. Peter is also learning what growth will be like in the church—making God's viewpoint our viewpoint. We should always remember that God's viewpoint is only learned by repetition; God is patient in teaching us. It is as difficult to surrender the old way of thinking as it is to grasp the new.

The Commission of Peter 10: 17-48

THE INVITATION OF THE GENTILES 10:17-23A

• Peter's Perplexity 10:17-18

"Now while Peter was greatly perplexed in mind as to what the vision which he had seen might be, behold, the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions for Simon's house, appeared at the gate;¹⁸ and calling out, they were asking whether Simon, who was also called Peter, was staying there."

In what sense did Peter not understand the meaning of the vision? He most certainly understood that the distinction in foods was apparently abolished. His question, however, was whether there was a deeper significance intended.

While Peter was in deep meditation over the vision, the messengers from Cornelius arrived. Had Peter been lodging in a patrician's home, there would have been a gate and a courtyard separating the living quarters from the street. However, he was in a craftsman's home, making the living quarters easily accessible from the street. The messengers shouted out their inquiry for anyone within earshot—"Is anyone named Simon staying here?"

As soon as Peter saw who the visitors were, the significance of the vision must have begun to dawn on him. Standing at the door were two gentile servants and a Roman soldier—surely a new day is dawning!

•Peter's Instruction 10:19-20

"And while Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men are looking for you. ²⁰But arise, go downstairs, and accompany them without misgivings; for I have sent them Myself.'"

The timing reveals the providence of God. Peter's anxious meditation and the arrival of the visitors is simultaneous. God's sovereignty fuses the two events into a relationship of cooperation. The word *misgivings* is *diakrino*, which means *to distinguish*. The same word is used by Peter in noting that in God's treatment of both Jew and Gentile "He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith (Acts 15:9)." Peter is to recognize socially what God is about to recognize doctrinally—Jew and Gentile on equal footing. Divine authorization stands behind Peter's mission to the Gentiles.

•Peter's Inquiry 10:21-23a

"And Peter went down to the men and said, 'Behold, I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for which you have come?' ²²And they said, 'Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, was divinely directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and hear a message from you.' ²³And so he invited them in and gave them lodging."

The gentile visitors knew exactly why they had been sent to Peter. Peter makes no attempt to hide his identity for he first identifies himself and then inquires as to the purpose of their visit. We are about to see the first official proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles; they will believe, and they will become part of the church.

One wonders what the conversation was that evening as Peter and three Gentiles talked at Peter's residence in Joppa. Six Jewish Christians decided to accompany Peter the next morning (Acts 11:12).

THE RECEPTION OF THE GENTILES 10:23B-33

•The Greeting of the Gentiles 10:23b-27

"And on the next day he arose and went away with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him. ²⁴And on the following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵And when it came about that Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him. ²⁶But Peter raised him up, saying, 'Stand up; I too am a just man.' ²⁷And as he talked with him, he entered, and found many people assembled."

It is not unusual that Cornelius would expect Peter to have some kind of supernatural character. The apostle John made a similar mistake of worshiping an angel in Revelation 22:8-9.

•Explanation of Peter 10:28-29

"And he said to them, 'You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean. ²⁹That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. And so I ask for what reason you have sent for me.'"

Peter's entry into Cornelius's household was a distinct breach of Jewish custom, and Peter lets this be known in the clearest terms. The word *unlawful* is equivalent to our word *taboo*. The word *law* implies legal enactment to us, whereas the Greek word refers to violation of custom and habit. Even ordinary food, such as milk and bread or olive oil, was taboo if it came from a gentile source. For this reason, even ordinary social intercourse was forbidden. Peter wants his audience to understand that he stands before them in knowing and deliberate contradiction of his lifelong Jewish convictions.

Peter's lesson from the vision of the sheet had shown him that he was not to discriminate concerning foods. It is important to note his words in verse 28 where he speaks of *any man* rather than *any food*. Peter has seen the deeper issue. Non-discrimination of foods meant non-discrimination of Jew and Gentile.

•The Confirmation of Cornelius 10:30-33

"And Cornelius said, 'Four days ago to this hour, I was praying in my house during the ninth hour; and behold, a man stood before me in shining garments, and he said, "Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. ³²Send therefore to Joppa and invite Simon, who is also called Peter, to come to you; he is staying at the house of Simon the tanner by the sea." ³³And so I sent to you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.'"

Cornelius repeats the account of verses 3-6 with a few unimportant exceptions. What Luke called an angel, Cornelius calls a man. This is understandable since angels when manifested often are taken to be men.

The perspective of the Gentiles is noteworthy—they stood *before God*, not before Peter. Further, they came *to hear*, not to be entertained; they wished to hear *all*, not part. Did ever a preacher of the gospel have a more promising audience than this?

THE MESSAGE TO THE GENTILES 10:34-48

• Its Content 10:34-43

The Introduction 10:34-35

“And opening his mouth, Peter said: ‘I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality,³⁵ but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him.’”

Peter’s sermon contains two parts: a statement of content (10:34-43) and a statement of results (10:44-48). As always, Jesus is the central theme in His life and death (10:36-39), His resurrection (10:40-41), and His salvation (10:42-43).

Why does verse 34 begin with *opening his mouth* when Peter said would be adequate? Because this is a phrase used to introduce a weighty utterance. This may be seen by examining its use in passages such as Matthew 5:2, where it introduces teaching concerning how those who have received the kingdom message of Jesus should live. In Acts 8:35 it introduces the momentous words of Philip applying the servant song of Isaiah 53 to Jesus. Here in Acts 10:34 the barrier of centuries is about to come down, and Peter is about to open the door of gentile salvation. Momentous events—weighty words—Peter opened his mouth!

The words of Peter rest upon a foundation of truth. *I most certainly understand now* translates three Greek words. The first is the preposition *epi*, which introduces the basis upon which something rests. It is followed by the word *truth*—*upon the basis of truth*. The third word is *understand*, which in the middle voice means to *grasp, find, perceive*. Peter has come to a personal and subjective understanding of a truth.

What is the truth that Peter now perceives? Peter has learned that God is not one to show partiality. These four words translate a single word in the Greek. It is a compound of the word *face* and the word *receive*. It refers to preferential treatment given to one over another on grounds other than righteousness and justice. It is asserted to be a characteristic of God in Romans 2:11, Ephesians 6:9, Colossians 3:25, James 2:1, and I Peter 1:17.

In verse 35 Peter applies this truth nationally. The verse does not teach that men may merit blessing; it does mean the door of opportunity is open to all regardless of national origin. The issue in the whole context of his sermon is: “Do those who are not among the Jews deserve an opportunity to hear the gospel?”

The Theme 10:36-43

JESUS: HIS LIFE AND DEATH 10:36-39

“The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all) — ³⁷you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. ³⁸You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil; for God was with Him. ³⁹And we are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. And they also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross.’ ”

Verse 36 is the caption of Peter’s message, and it sets the tone for what follows by emphasizing four things. First, the message is revelatory in nature—the *Word which He (God) sent*. The message was a divine revelation, not a human invention. Second, the recipients of the message are *the sons of Israel*. Israel was God’s chosen nation for the communication of truth and for the coming of the Messiah; no other nation had such privilege. Third, the content of the message is *peace through Jesus Christ*. The peace spoken of is peace with God as taught in Romans 5:1. Fourth, the scope of the message is expressed in the words *He is Lord of all*. The universality of Jesus’ Lordship is a call for the preaching of the gospel to all men.

The reference to the anointing of Jesus entails three passages. First, the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1 concerning the relationship of the Messiah to the Holy Spirit. Second, the reading of that prophecy by Jesus in Luke 4:18-20. Third, the application of the prophecy to Jesus in Acts 10:38.

Death by crucifixion (*hanging Him on a cross*) points to two major things. First, it indicates an agonizing death; second, it means a degrading death.

JESUS: HIS RESURRECTION 10:40-41

“God raised Him up on the third day, and granted that He should become visible, ⁴¹not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us, who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.’ ”

The resurrection may be viewed from several different perspectives, each one perfectly correct. First, the resurrection may be conceived of as a standard of power (Ephesians 1:19-20). Second, it may be viewed as proof that the work of Christ on the cross satisfied the righteous demands of God perfectly, and salvation is now complete (Romans 4:25). Third, the resurrection of Jesus may be seen as proof of the resurrection doctrine itself (I Corinthians 15:16). Fourth, the resurrection is the precursor and guarantee of the believer’s resurrection (I Corinthians 15:20). Finally, it may be seen as the divine reversal of men’s action in the crucifixion of Jesus.

The latter is a typical theme in the book of Acts, and Acts 10:30-40 is an example. The literal and bodily resurrection of Jesus is emphasized by reference to seeing Him and eating and drinking with Him.

JESUS: HIS SALVATION 10:42-43

“ ‘And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.’ ”

The Message of Wrath 10:42 Every man will stand before Jesus Christ, facing Him as either Judge or Savior. Our relationship to Him in this life will determine which.

The Message of Grace 10:43 The grounds of salvation is *through His name*; the scope of salvation is to *everyone*; the condition of salvation is *who believes*; and the result of believing is *forgiveness of sins*.

•Its Impact 10:44-48

The Interruption 10:44a

“While Peter was still speaking these words...”

The first two words of verse 44 in the Greek text are *still speaking*. This emphasizes the sudden interruption that took place as Peter spoke. Why did God “break in” to Peter’s preaching in this way? There are two important reasons. First, because all that was needed for salvation had just been said; nothing more was necessary. Second, because there is never a time interval between man’s faith and God’s response. The instant the gospel is believed, God responds. God’s response was not to a prayer or a petition, but to an attitude—faith!

The Gift 10:44b-46a

“... the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. ⁴⁵And all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also. ⁴⁶For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God.”

The coming of the Holy Spirit is described as a *gift*. A gift by definition is free—if it is not absolutely free, it is not a gift. The phenomenon of verse 46 drew Peter to the conclusion that the Gentiles had also received the Holy Spirit. The reality of this is clear to Peter but not to the rest of the church, as the event of Acts 11:1-18 will reveal.

The Symbol 10:46b-48

“Then Peter answered, ⁴⁷“Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?”

⁴⁸ *And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days."*

These verses demonstrate the order of salvation and baptism. Salvation clearly precedes baptism. The phrase *in the name of Jesus Christ* is identical to that found in Acts 2:38. We do not know if Peter himself baptized; he may, as did Jesus, have assigned the responsibility to someone else.

In Jerusalem 11:1-18

Acts 10:1 through 11:18 emphasizes two important themes: the history of gentile salvation (10:1-48) and the response to gentile salvation (11:1-18).

While Peter's preaching of the gospel in the house of Cornelius was a milestone, it did not solve the problem of Jew-Gentile relationship in the church. First, the initial response of the Jerusalem church was one of doubt concerning what Peter had done (11:1-18). Second, the problem of the gentile relationship to Jewish law and custom remained (Acts 15:19-20). The decision not to impose the Law on Gentiles was not considered a mandate for gentile evangelism. This commission was initiated by the Holy Spirit at the church in Antioch in Acts 13:1-3.

The Criticism of Peter 11:1-3

ITS OCCASION 11:1

"Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God."

The news of Peter's preaching to Gentiles reached Jerusalem rapidly. To this point, the early preachers of the gospel had been the target of intense opposition from those outside the Christian community. Now, for the first time, opposition issues from within the Jewish Christian community.

ITS CONTENT 11 :2-3

"And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him, saying, 'You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.'"

The words *took issue* are important; they translate the Greek word *diakrino*. Its basic meaning is *to distinguish, to discriminate, to differentiate* and easily incorporates the idea of disagreement. Most significant, however, is that it represents an attitude that God had forbidden. This is easy to miss in the English text. However, if one looks back to Acts 10:20, God says to Peter, "But arise, go downstairs, and accompany them (gentile messengers sent from Cornelius) without misgivings; for I have sent them Myself." The word *misgivings* is the word *diakrino*, the same verb found in Acts 11:2 and translated *took issue*. The circumcised Jews of Jerusalem reveal an

attitude toward Gentiles that God had already commanded Peter not to have.

Setting aside Jewish tradition concerning relationship to Gentiles created tension between believing Gentiles and believing Jews. This conflict will become a full blown crisis and the subject of the first doctrinal debate in the church, known as the Jerusalem conference (Acts 15).

The Explanation of Peter 11:4-17

"But Peter began speaking and proceeded to explain to them in orderly sequence, saying, 'I was in the city of Joppa praying...'"

The entire narrative through verse 17 is not repeated since it recounts what we have already learned in chapter 10. We need to see its unique emphasis: The action was that of God, and Peter could not resist it. Peter argues that it was not he but God who initiated the events that occurred at Joppa and Caesarea. It was God Himself who lowered the sheet and spoke to him (11:8). Peter recognized the voice that corrected him as that of God (11:9). Further, it was the voice of the Holy Spirit that had directed his journey to Caesarea (11:12). Finally, it was the Holy Spirit who fell on the Gentiles (11:15).

Peter further reports how he had recalled the words of Jesus concerning the baptism of the Spirit (Acts 11:16) and links the coming of the Spirit on the Gentiles to what had happened to Jewish believers on the day of Pentecost. Concluding that Gentiles had received the same gift as the Jews, he refuses to resist such divine action. To do so would have been "to stand in God's way... (Acts 11:17)."

The Conclusion of the Church 11:18

"And when they heard this, they quieted down, and glorified God, saying, 'Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.'"

The concept of one body now begins to emerge. The Jerusalem believers must learn that God's grace not only forgives sin but creates a new brotherhood as well. It is now official—Jew and Gentile alike may experience God's grace.

In Antioch 11:19-30

The Church Established 11:19-21

THE OCCASION 11:19

"So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone."

Antioch was founded in about 300 B.C. by Seleucus and named for either his father or his son. It was one of fifteen other cities that

were also named Antioch. It was distinguished from other Antiochs as "Antioch-on-the-Orontes." It was about three hundred miles north of Jerusalem and twenty miles from the Mediterranean seacoast.

The largest city in the Roman Empire was Rome, followed by Alexandria, and then Antioch with a population of about five hundred thousand. The main street of Antioch was about four miles long and was lined with luxurious homes. Its spiritual significance surpasses all other features, however, as it becomes the new headquarters for world evangelization. All three of Paul's missionary journeys originate here.

One might think that the impetus for evangelism in Antioch was sparked by the salvation of the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius in the preceding chapter. This is not the case, however, as Luke points us back to the persecution that followed the martyrdom of Stephen in chapter 6.

THE EVANGELISTS 11:20-21

"But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus.²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord."

The pronouns *some*, *them*, and *who* show these evangelists to be unknown Christians. Their methods are expressed in words such as *speaking*, which is a word for ordinary conversation, and *preaching*, which is the verb form of the noun that means *good news*.

The Church Edified 11:22-28

BY ENCOURAGEMENT FROM BARNABAS 11:22-24

"And the news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch.²³ Then when he had come and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord,²⁴ for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord."

Why was Barnabas selected to go to Antioch? It is possible that he was the only one in Jerusalem who truly understood grace. Acts 9:26-27 shows that by and large most of the Jerusalem Christians held Paul's past against him—at least it made them apprehensive of the genuineness of his conversion. Not so Barnabas, who received Paul warmly.

The new church at Antioch would send gifts to the Jerusalem believers. Barnabas was especially qualified to help them in this ministry since he had engaged in a similar mission as recorded in Acts 4:36-37. The same verses also tell us he was "of Cyprian birth," giving him a common homeland with those who evangelized Antioch (Acts 11:20).

BY TEACHING FROM PAUL 11:25-26

"And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; ²⁶and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And it came about that for an entire year they met with the church, and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch."

Barnabas found there were more new converts than he could teach by himself, so he sought out Saul and brought him to Antioch.

A local assembly of believers has been born; it is important to note their activities, expressed by the words *met* and *taught*. The gathering of believers together for the purpose of being taught was a central feature of church life in Antioch. These sessions were conducted by Saul for a full year.

The designation "Christian" is first discovered at Antioch. The word *called* means *to conduct business*. To transact business under a particular name is to be known by that name. Believers in Antioch conducted all of their affairs in the name of Christ and thus came to be known as "Christ people" or "Christians."

The new designation gave rise to a new problem. Under this name, believers began to risk the loss of the protection Rome gave to religions it deemed "religio licita." Judaism had been granted that status; Christianity had not. If Christianity retains its identity with Judaism, it is safe—if not, it has no legal status with Rome.

BY PROPHECY FROM AGABUS 11:27-28

"Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸And one of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius."

Prophets served to meet the pre-canon needs of the early church. Divine revelation was being given the apostles as they wrote the books that comprise the New Testament today; and prophets, both male and female, were used by God to deliver messages of urgency to the young church.

Agabus predicts a world-wide famine under Claudius, who was emperor from A.D. 41-54. Various Roman historians, such as Suetonius, Tacitus, and Dio Cassius, refer to a series of bad harvests and famine conditions during his reign. Josephus reports a particularly severe famine in Palestine in A.D. 45-47. The "famine visit" of Saul and Barnabas is recorded in Acts 11:29-30 and occurred in about A.D. 46.

The Church Giving 11:29-30

"And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. ³⁰And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders."

We are given no information concerning how the relief was collected, administered, or delivered, though it was probably in the form of food such as corn. This journey to Jerusalem by Saul and Barnabas was probably in A.D. 46 and gives a first date for working out a chronology of Paul's life and ministry. In Galatians 2:2 Paul speaks of going to Jerusalem "because of a revelation." This could be a reference to the prophecy of Agabus.

THE CONTINUATION OF THE GOSPEL 12:1-25

While emphasizing the advancement of the gospel beyond Jerusalem, Luke wishes to prevent the false impression that God was through with Jerusalem. Though it is true that at this historical juncture Antioch becomes, and will continue to be, the headquarters for world evangelism, God is still blessing the church in Jerusalem. Thus, the theme of Acts 12 is the activity of God in the city of Jerusalem.

The Delivery of Peter 12:1-19

The Historical Introduction 12:1-4

"Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church, in order to mistreat them. ²And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword. ³And when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread. ⁴And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people."

The Herod spoken of here is Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great. After his father's execution in 7 B.C., he was sent to Rome with his mother, Bernice. In his youth, Herod was very much a playboy; and in A.D. 23 he went so heavily into debt that he fled to Idumea to escape his creditors.

Agrippa received the northernmost tetrarchies from Caligula along with the title "king." Agrippa later received the tetrarchy of Herod Antipas when he was banished in A.D. 39.

Herod Agrippa I was hated by the Jews but did everything he could to win their affection. When Agrippa was in Rome, he lived as a Roman; but when in Jerusalem, as an observant Jew. The Gemara (Jewish commentary) says, "The King is guided by the Queen, and the Queen is guided by Gamaliel (famous and respected Rabbi of New Testament times)." The Mishnah, speaking of firstfruits, says, "When they reached the Temple Mount even Agrippa the king would take his basket on his shoulder and enter in as far as the Temple Court." In accordance with the prescription of Deuteronomy 17:14-20, we are told that upon reading verse 15 "his eyes flowed with tears (because of his Edomite background) but they called out to him 'Our brother art thou!'"

Agrippa supported the Pax Romana through maintaining status quo in his kingdom. He supported the majority and suppressed the minority. He regarded Christians as a threat to the status quo; and as a result, Peter and James were arrested (Acts 12:2-4). James, one of the original disciples, was beheaded, becoming the first disciple to be martyred. His death was a remarkable fulfillment of Jesus' words found in Mark 10:35-39.

The Historical Event 12:5-19

ITS SPIRITUAL CONTEXT 12:5

"So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God."

Prayer was the natural atmosphere for God's people. It was the typical response to events. Acts 4 provides a good example. When the apostles reported to the church "all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them," such as commanding them to speak no more in the name of Jesus, we are told the church "lifted their voices to God with one accord and said... ." Such a response was a natural part of church life. Prayer was also the normal context for divine activity. Note passages such as Acts 1:14, 24; 2:42; 4:24-31; 6:4, 6; 9:40; 10:2, 4, 9, 31; 11:5; 13:3; 14:23; 16:25; 22:17; and 28:8.

THE PHYSICAL ASPECTS 12:6-17

•Peter Escorted 12:6-10

"And on the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains; and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison. ⁷And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared, and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and roused him, saying, 'Get up quickly.' And his chains fell off his hands. ⁸And the angel said to him, 'Gird yourself and put on your sandals.' And he did so. And he said to him, 'Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.' ⁹And he went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰And when they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street; and immediately the angel departed from him."

It was not typical for a prisoner to be held by two soldiers. This means Agrippa had assigned a double guard. The *angel of the Lord* is consistently representative of the presence of God in the affairs of men. The only human effort put forth on behalf of Peter was prayer; nothing was done by Peter or anyone else to effect his release. Believers were praying fervently for Peter, serving to illustrate the words of James 5:16, "The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."

We are told the gate opened for them *by itself*. These two words translate the Greek word *automata*, which the English reader will recognize as *automatic*.

Acts 12:6-10 gives great detail about Peter's delivery from prison, i.e., passing the guards, the opening of the gate, all of which calls upon us to note the precise care of God for the chosen apostle.

•Peter Alone 12:11-12

"And when Peter came to himself, he said, 'Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.'¹² And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying."

While some commentators hold that the delivery of Peter was brought about by human means—someone drugged the guards and bribed someone to gain the key—this was not the opinion of Peter, for he was certain that the delivery was from the Lord alone.

When Peter realized the supernatural character of his delivery, he knew how dangerous it was to be standing in the streets if Herod's soldiers found him. He went immediately to one of the meeting places of Christians, the home of Mary.

•Peter Greeted 12:13-17

"And when he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer.¹⁴ And when she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate.¹⁵ And they said to her, 'You are out of your mind!' But she kept insisting that it was so. And they kept saying, 'It is his angel.'¹⁶ But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door, they saw him and were amazed.¹⁷ But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, 'Report these things to James and the brethren.' And he departed and went to another place."

These verses are filled with confusion and joyful humor. Rhoda, in her excitement, forgets to open the door; the people who were praying conclude she is crazy or has seen an angel. In the meanwhile, Peter continues to knock on the door; and when he finally enters, he has to take action to get everyone calmed down.

The lesson the church learns is this: The Lord is as strong in protecting them from the Roman Empire as He was in protecting them from the Jewish Sanhedrin.

Peter now disappears from the narrative of the book of Acts. No one knows where he went. We do meet him one more time at the Jerusalem conference in Acts 15.

THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT 12:18-19

"Now when day came, there was no small disturbance among the soldiers as to what could have become of Peter.¹⁹ And when Herod had searched for him and had not found him, he examined the guards and ordered that they be led away to execution. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea and was spending time there."

The code of Justinian explains that a soldier who let a prisoner escape was subject to the same penalty the prisoner would have suffered. Therefore, the execution of the soldiers shows the fate that Herod had in mind for Peter.

The Death of Herod 12:20-25

The story of the death of Herod revolves about two political events: the Tyre/Sidon delegation and the great Caesar show.

The Tyre/Sidon Delegation 12:20

"Now he (Herod) was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; and with one accord they came to him, and having won over Blastus the king's chamberlain, they were asking for peace, because their country was fed by the king's country."

Caesarea had a very fine man-made seaport. To the north of it were two seaport towns, Tyre and Sidon. These two cities did something that offended Herod, though we do not know what it was. The event is Luke's explanation of the setting for the death of Herod. Josephus offers a parallel account of Agrippa's death.

The Great Caesar Show 12:21-23

"And on an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them. ²²And the people kept crying out, 'The voice of a god and not of a man!' ²³And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died."

According to Josephus (Antiquities XIX, 8.2 [Note: XIX indicates book; 8 indicates chapter; 2 indicates paragraph]), Agrippa inaugurated a festival in which Caesar was honored. The event attracted many provincial officials and other dignitaries.

The reference to being *eaten by worms* may refer to intestinal roundworms, which feed on nutrients in the intestines. Obstruction of the intestines could bring severe pain and death. There is also the possibility that eaten by worms referred to the death of those considered worthy of an ignominious end to life. Whatever the physical details may have been, Luke's emphasis is on the judgment of God upon Herod.

The Summation and Transition 12:24-25

"But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied. ²⁵And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark."

The progress report emphasizes by means of contrast the ongoing progress of the gospel and the miserable end of its royal persecutor. Verse 25 presents us with the personnel for the first missionary journey as the gospel now begins its dramatic move west.

The First Missionary Journey

*or “The Radical New Policy—
Westward with the Gospel”*

Acts 13:1-14:28

THE OUTLINE

- A. The Call of Saul and Barnabas 13:1-3
- B. The Itinerary of Saul and Barnabas 13:4-14:28
 - 1. Evangelizing the Island of Cyprus 13:4-12
 - 2. Evangelizing Pisidian Antioch 13:13-52
 - 3. Evangelizing Iconium 14:1-7
 - 4. Evangelizing Lystra 14:8-18
 - 5. Coming Back to Antioch 14:19-28

THE COMMENTARY

Acts 13 introduces a new policy for the preaching of the gospel. Its foundation rests upon the legitimacy of a direct approach to the gentile world with the message of salvation. This was first implemented when God sent Peter to the house of Cornelius and blessed the gentile believers with the gift of the Holy Spirit. What had been legitimate now becomes a mandate, and Barnabas and Saul are sent from Antioch to the Gentiles.

This mandate carried strong implications. First, the gospel was to be proclaimed to the Gentile with no commitment to Judaism required. Second, the gospel was to be proclaimed with no Jewish stand taken by the missionaries. This will be observed by Paul and Barnabas on this first journey. Official clarification of such an approach will be made after the journey at the Jerusalem conference (Acts 15).

Acts 13 marks two other transitions. First, it introduces a change in the geographical focal point. With the destruction of Jerusalem on the horizon, activity shifts north about three hundred miles to Antioch from which the

missionary journeys proceed. Second, we have a change of personalities. Acts 1-12 focuses on Peter; Acts 13-29 focuses on Paul.

THE CALL OF SAUL AND BARNABAS 13:1-3

"Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ²And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' ³Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away."

There were five prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch. They are marked off by an untranslatable Greek particle, *te*. This particle is used to connect word pairs together. It served to distinguish words and clauses that needed to be grouped together. The first *te* is connected to Barnabas and the second to Manaen. This means Barnabas, Simeon, and Lucius were prophets; whereas Manaen and Saul were teachers.

The ideas of foretelling and forthtelling were included in the function of a prophet. Showing the relationship of Jesus to Old Testament Messianic prophecy was the function of a teacher. Who, then, were each of these five men?

Barnabas was from Cyprus but lived in Jerusalem. He was a leading figure in the Jerusalem church and represented a grace orientation as demonstrated by his immediate acceptance of Saul after his conversion (Acts 9:26-30). Unfortunately, he was swept off his feet by the hypocrisy of legalism led by Peter (Galatians 2:13).

Simeon may have been from Africa. The word *Niger* is a Latin loan word meaning *black*. Some have taken him to be the Simon who carried the cross of Jesus (Luke 23:26). If so, what a story he had to tell! He apparently had two sons who were well-known Christians (Mark 15:21).

We know nothing of Lucius and Manaen other than what is recorded here. The words *who had been brought up* translate the Greek word *suntrophos*, which literally means *foster brother* or *intimate friend*. It was used of boys of the same age as royal princes who were brought up with them in the royal court.

As for Saul, we will learn much; but we first met him watching the stoning of Stephen with hearty approval.

Luke is highly condensed, perhaps even a bit clipped, in the words of Acts 13:2-3. We might wonder how the Holy Spirit made His will known, or what was the nature of their special ministry to be, what is the antecedent of the pronoun *they* in verse 2?

Whatever the answers to these questions might be, we can unquestionably observe the sensitivity of the church at Antioch to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. The men mentioned were devoting

much time to the Lord. This is stressed by the repeated reference to fasting.

The concept involved in fasting is the devotion of one's time to the Lord to the neglect of food. Even today, when we are particularly busy, we speak of "skipping lunch" or "working through lunch." Fasting, though mentioned in Scripture, is never commanded.

The laying on of hands denotes three things throughout the Bible. First, it was done in order to pronounce a blessing, as in Genesis 48:13. Second, it was done in order to express an identification with something or someone, as in Leviticus 1:4. Finally, laying on of hands was done in order to commission someone to a job or office as in Numbers 27:23 and here in Acts 13:3.

THE ITINERARY OF SAUL AND BARNABAS 13:4-14:28

Evangelizing the Island of Cyprus 13:4-12

The Moving Power: The Holy Spirit 13:4

"So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus."

The central theme is a ministry made effective by the Holy Spirit. He was the initiator of the call (13:2), the director of movement (13:4), and the source of courage (13:9).

The Central Message: The Word of God 13:5

"And when they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper."

Paul's travels were always strategically planned. The leading of the Spirit did not dictate random actions but planned movement. We will find Paul following the major Roman roads in his evangelistic travels. Salamis was the most important city on the island and was the administrative center for the eastern half of Cyprus.

The practice of preaching the gospel first of all in the Jewish synagogues was a feature of all of Paul's missionary work (compare Romans 1:16). The Jews were the first to receive God's word and also the first to reject it. Paphos was the seat of the Roman provincial government. The focal point there will be the Roman procurator and a Jewish false prophet.

What about the presence of John (Mark)? He was not specifically called as were Paul and Barnabas. He does return home to Jerusalem from Paphos and is later held blameworthy in Paul's view. Perhaps he is an example of volunteering without a call.

The Fierce Opposition: Primary and Secondary 13:6-12

THE SECONDARY OPPOSITION 13:6-8

"And when they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus, ⁷who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. ⁸But Elymas the magician (for thus his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith."

Bar-Jesus is an Aramaic name meaning "Son of Jesus." He was a false prophet in the sense that he falsely claimed to be divinely called, not in the sense that his "miracles" were fraudulent. Had they been, he probably could not have inspired the confidence of the people as he did.

The true nature of Sergius Paulus' intelligence is manifested in verse 12 where we are told *he believed*. Why did this man wish to hear the word of God? Was it because of spiritual interest? Probably not, for the word *summoned* has a legal tone (see same in Acts 5:40). As a Roman official, it was his duty to know what was going on in the province. His request to hear Paul was probably more on the order of a legal subpoena.

Verses 8-11 may be viewed as an insertion between verse 7 where Sergius *sought to hear the word of God* and verse 12 where he *believed*. This arrangement carries doctrinal significance. It teaches us that it is always the purpose of Satan to isolate the potential convert from the word of God. The word is *heard* first; then the opposition enters in an attempt to keep him from the truth.

What is meant by Elymas' attempt to divert Sergius Paulus from *the faith*? The presence of the definite article with the noun *faith* is important. The focus is not so much on *faith attitude* as on *faith content*. We could paraphrase, saying he was "seeking to turn the proconsul away from Christian doctrine." This first recorded incident of Paul's missionary journeys reveals the scenario that will follow.

THE PRIMARY OPPOSITION 13:9-11

"But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze upon him, ¹⁰and said, 'You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? ¹¹And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time.' And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand."

Verse 9 is the first instance of Saul being called Paul in the book of Acts. His rebuke is both severe and insightful. He recognized Elymas to be the tool of Satan, the primary antagonist of the truth. It is important to note that the severe words were evidence of the filling of the Holy Spirit. Since the words are motivated and direct-

ed by the Holy Spirit, they manifest perfect love. Love always tells the truth.

Elymas is called the *son of the devil*, which links him to the supernatural power behind his antagonism. It also shows the falsity of his profession. He who was called *son of Jesus* is in reality *son of the devil*.

As in all judgments, God's grace is predominant, as seen here in the temporary nature of the blinding judgment placed upon Elymas. Does Paul remember how the blindness of his own eyes brought light to his mind?

THE SUCCESSFUL ENDING 13:12

"Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord."

There is no reason to believe that this was anything other than a genuine conversion. The proconsul did what the gospel demands—he believed. His belief is the same spoken of in Acts 14:1, 17:34, and 19:18, all of which point to genuine conversions.

Evangelizing Pisidian Antioch 13:13-52

The Arrival 13:13-15

"Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John left them and returned to Jerusalem. ¹⁴But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. ¹⁵And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, 'Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.'"

Why did John Mark leave the missionary party at this time? While we cannot answer this question completely, three suggestions may be made, of which any one or perhaps all may be true.

Paul's opinion is given in Acts 15:36-38 where suggestion is made that the churches established on the first journey be revisited.

Barnabas wished to take Mark along. Paul, however, "kept insisting that they should not take him (Mark) along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work."

Barnabas and Paul disagree so intensely that they part company and go different ways. In Paul's view, Mark was a quitter and had deserted him. Barnabas's attachment to Mark might be explained by their relationship as cousins. The sovereignty of God worked all things together for good because Paul returned to Anatolia with Silas, and Barnabas and Mark went to Cyprus—two sets of missionaries instead of one.

One could also argue that Mark left the work and returned to Jerusalem because he was not specifically called as Saul and Barnabas were. In Acts 13:2 the Holy Spirit designates Saul and

Barnabas for the special work but says nothing of John Mark. Did Mark go unbidden?

It is also possible that Mark returned because of the decreasing prominence of himself and Barnabas. In Acts 13:2 it was *Barnabas and Saul*, but in Acts 13:13 it is *Paul and his companions*. Does this point to a decline in the importance of Barnabas and Mark? Perhaps.

Upon arrival in Antioch, the missionary team goes to the synagogue, providing the setting for Paul's sermon found in Acts 13:16-41. Paul continues his evangelistic pattern—to the Jew first, then the Gentile.

The synagogue service consisted of three parts. First, there was the reading of the Torah. A corresponding passage was then read from the prophets. Finally, someone appointed by the synagogue officials delivered the sermon or the exhortation. It was customary to question the one who delivered the sermon, and a discussion often developed from this. On the occasion spoken of in Acts 13, Saul and his companions are offered an opportunity to speak; and Saul eagerly accepts the invitation.

The Message 13:16-41

THE PREPARATION FOR THE MESSIAH 13:16-22

"And Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand, he said, 'Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: ¹⁷The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it. ¹⁸And for a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness. ¹⁹And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance—all of which took about four hundred and fifty years. ²⁰And after these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. ²¹And then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. ²²And after He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after my own heart, who will do all My will." ' "

Paul's opening words remind us of the composition of his audience. *Men of Israel* refers to those who were Jews by birth or proselytization. *You who fear God* refers to Gentiles who respected Judaism and associated themselves with the synagogue. The latter group will prove most responsive to the gospel.

Verses 17-22 review five pillars of Judaism. First, their relationship to God is expressed by the words *the God of this people Israel*. No other nation of antiquity bore a relationship to the true God. The God of Israel was the only true God—all others were false gods. The God of Israel was self-revealing; He was the only true God, and only the true God spoke.

Next, the result of the relationship just mentioned was due to divine choice. In order to bring redemption to man, God chose Abraham (the first of the “fathers”); and this choice was based on the sovereign will of God, not any quality that might be found in Israel (Deuteronomy 7:6).

The *uplifted arm* is the symbol of God’s power (Exodus 6:6, Psalm 136:11-12) and points to redemption, a third pillar of Israel’s position. Accompanying God’s redemption from the land was His appointment to the land. The seven nations in verse 19 are listed in Deuteronomy 7:1. This bestowal of the land was spread over a rather long period of time. The Jebusites were the inhabitants of Jerusalem and were not overcome until the time of David.

Finally, verses 21-22 focus on Israel’s king. David is referred to as a man after God’s own heart in I Samuel 13:14 and is exalted in Psalm 89:19-29. Paul began with Abraham and now ends his Old Testament review with King David. All of this history is regarded as preparation for the Messiah.

THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE MESSIAH 13:23-25

“ ‘From the offspring of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus,’²⁴ after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. ²⁵And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, ‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.’ ”

Paul has traced the history of Israel from Abraham to David and in verse 23 leaps forward a full millennium—from David to Jesus. The Savior is from the Davidic line, and Jesus is that Savior who was identified by John the Baptist. John’s ministry was one of disavowal and affirmation. He denied that he was the Messiah and affirmed that Jesus alone was.

THE REJECTION OF THE MESSIAH 13:26-31

“ ‘Brethren, sons of Abraham’s family, and those among you who fear God, to us the word of this salvation is sent out. ²⁷For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him. ²⁸And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. ²⁹And when they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. ³⁰But God raised Him from the dead; ³¹and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people.’ ”

• It Brought Man's Salvation 13:26

The words *to us* show that the message of salvation is to be proclaimed in a universal context. It revolves about a four point historical Christian profession: the death of Jesus (13:28), the burial of Jesus (13:29), the resurrection of Jesus (13:30), and the

appearances of Jesus (13:31). Paul's statement of the gospel in I Corinthians 15:1-5 follows the same pattern. These historical events show that salvation is not the offer of a subjective experience but is the proclamation of an objective fact. *Word* is *logos*, which refers to a message or a doctrine; and the word *this* with *salvation* serves to particularize. Paul proclaims a salvation that centers specifically on that brought by Christ. The method of salvation is also implied by this word, meaning "this *way* of being saved, i.e. through Christ alone. "

• It Demonstrated God's Sovereignty 13:27-29

Paul demonstrates this point by reciting the historical account of what had happened in Jerusalem about fifteen years earlier when men rejected Jesus. Both verses 27 and 29 state that the actions of men, sinful though they were, brought about the fulfillment of Scripture. God's sovereign direction is seen in the treatment of Jesus by those who hated Him.

• It Displayed the Son's Victory 13:30-31

Divine reversal of human action is a theme of Acts. It had been emphasized on many occasions by Peter, and now Paul reiterates the same point. As always in the New Testament, the resurrection of Jesus is verified by eyewitnesses.

THE SALVATION OF THE MESSIAH 13:32-41

• The Gospel Introduced 13:32

" 'And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers...' "

The single verb *we preach...good news* is *euangelizo*, a compound of *to proclaim* and *good*. It portrays an activity and denotes a certain kind of message. While the verb may express good news of any sort, in the New Testament it always refers to good news from God to man. It is found about twelve times in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Peter uses it once in his letters, and it occurs twice in the book of Acts. When we examine Paul's letters, we find it sixty-two times! Paul is the great expositor of the gospel.

• The Gospel Supported 13:33-37

" '...that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, "Thou art My Son; today I have begotten Thee." ³⁴And as for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no more to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: "I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David." ³⁵Therefore He also says in another Psalm, "Thou wilt not allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay." ³⁶For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers, and underwent decay; ³⁷but He whom God raised did not undergo decay.' "

Verses 33 and 34 both speak of Jesus as one who was raised up. The meaning in each verse is different, however. In the first instance, Jesus is raised up in the sense of entering the scene. See

Acts 7:37 for a similar remark concerning Moses. In verse 34, He is raised up in the sense of coming back from the dead.

The salvation message has the support of Psalm 2:7 and 16:10. Psalm 2 should be viewed as the inauguration day of Israel's king. Jesus was eternally God's Son but was placed in special relationship by the decree of Psalm 2:7.

The words of Psalm 16:10 were spoken by David. Subsequent history, however, proves they were not fulfilled in David because he died and was buried and suffered decay and corruption. The prophecy was therefore fulfilled in another—namely, Jesus. This passage was first applied to Jesus in Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:25-32).

• The Gospel Offered 13:38-41

"Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, ³⁹and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses. ⁴⁰Take heed therefore, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you: ⁴¹"Behold, you scoffers, and marvel, and perish; for I am accomplishing a work in your days, a work which you will never believe, though someone should declare it to you."

These verses introduce three new lines of teaching by Paul. First, Paul introduces the doctrine of justification by faith. The NASB translation gives us the word *freed* in verse 39. This is the Greek word *dikaioo*, the New Testament word for justification. Paul gives a full exposition of justification by faith in the book of Romans; he defends it in the book of Galatians. The two verbals (*freed*) found in verse 39 are passive voice. Justification is the act of God upon man wherein we are declared righteous on the basis of the cross work of Jesus Christ.

Our translation reverses the order of the original text in verse 39. The Greek text gives the negative statement first then the positive. It moves from helplessness to hope, from the impossible to the possible. We cannot be justified by keeping the Law of Moses; we can only be justified by faith in Christ.

The second new line of teaching involves a contrast between Moses and Christ. This is the first time this occurs in the book of Acts. That man cannot be justified by keeping the Law of Moses will form a major thrust in the teaching of Paul. This will become a stumbling block to the Jew and foolishness to the Gentile (I Corinthians 1:23-24). Finally, for the first time we meet the expression *eternal life* (13:46, 48).

The Results 13:42-52

THE IMMEDIATE RESULTS 13:42-43

"And as Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath. ⁴³Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God."

Though Paul eagerly accepted the invitation to teach, it seems obvious from verse 42 that Paul did not plan to participate in the questioning period. His immediate departure would say, "What I have said stands; questioning and clarification are not needed."

Here for the first time, *grace* is used in the Pauline sense of describing God's gift of salvation. The expression *grace of God* reaches back to verses 38-39 and summarizes the content of those two verses. *Forgiveness* and *justification* are elements in a grace salvation.

THE INTERMEDIATE RESULTS 13:44-49

"And the next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of God. ⁴⁵But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy, and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming. ⁴⁶And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷For thus the Lord has commanded us, "I have placed you as a light for the Gentiles, that you should bring salvation to the end of the earth." ' ⁴⁸And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. ⁴⁹And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region."

The bold proclamation of Paul referred to here is described vividly in Galatians 3:1 where Paul speaks of Christ as *publicly portrayed* before them. The verb is *prographo*, which means *to write before*. It was used in the papyri by a father who wished to make public notice that he would no longer be responsible for his son's debts.

Acts 13:46-48 describes a crisis in the ministry of Paul, and the response to the preaching of the gospel in Antioch represents a turn in the road. First, the Jews rejected the offer of salvation, whereas the Gentiles accepted it. Second, God accordingly rejects the Jews; and the apostles turn to the Gentiles. The action of Acts 13:46 is repeated in Acts 18:6 and 19:8-9.

In his bold proclamation, Paul quotes Isaiah 49:6. In its initial context, the servant that will be a light to the Gentiles is Israel. In Luke 2:27-33, Simeon sees the fulfillment of Isaiah 49:6 as Jesus. Finally, here in Acts 13:47, Paul sees himself as the instrument of witness to the Gentiles. No contradiction is involved; it is not unusual for a prophecy to have a dual application.

Acts 13:48-49 gives a summary statement of the success of the word of God. Salvation is viewed from the side of human responsibility and then from the standpoint of divine election.

The “turning to the Gentiles” scenario may be traced as follows. First, the salvation of Gentiles was prophesied in the Old Testament. See passages such as Genesis 22:18, 26:4, 28:14; Isaiah 49:6, and Zechariah 8:22. Second, the Jews believed they were the agents of divine blessing, and only through the nation and its institutions could Gentiles partake in divine blessing. Third, until the missionary journey of Paul, all who came to know Jesus as the Messiah were either Jews or proselytes (near or far). Fourth, on his journey to Asia, Paul had offered salvation to the Gentiles on a faith basis. This will later cause a stir in the Jerusalem Church that results in the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15.

THE FINAL RESULTS 13:50-52

“But the Jews aroused the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. ⁵¹But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. ⁵²And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”

The Jewish community could not prevent Gentile reception of the gospel; they could, however, make the stay of the missionaries intolerable. Luke consistently reports that it was the Jewish communities that were at the forefront of opposition to Paul. Civic and provincial officials did not instigate persecution of Christians. They were, however, often incited by the Jews.

Verse 52 presents a characteristic of early Christianity—rejoicing in the midst of circumstances that would normally produce the opposite effect.

Evangelizing Iconium 14:1-7

“And it came about that in Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a great multitude believed, both of Jews and of Greeks. ²But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles, and embittered them against the brethren. ³Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands. ⁴But the multitude of the city was divided; and some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles. ⁵And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them, ⁶they became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region; and there they continued to preach the gospel.”

The Uniqueness of Events at Iconium

The events that occurred in Pisidian Antioch are now repeated with four exceptions.

EMPHASIS ON OPPOSITION TO THE WORK

In both Antioch and Iconium, Luke emphasizes the results of the preaching of the gospel; but in each place, the emphasis is different. The evangelization of Antioch dwells mainly on the success of the work (Acts 13:42-43), whereas the evangelization of Iconium dwells on the opposition to the work (Acts 14:2, 4-6).

THE PERFORMANCE OF MIRACLES IN ICONIUM

This stands in contrast to Antioch where, as far as we know, there were none. When Paul writes the letter to the Galatian churches, of which Iconium was one, he mentions the miracles that had been performed in her midst (Galatians 3:1-5).

THE APOSTLES FLEE FOR THEIR LIVES FROM ICONIUM

While they were forced out of Antioch, it was not upon threat of death. This was the case in Iconium, however (14:5-6).

GENTILE OPPOSITION TO THE GOSPEL FIRST DEVELOPED IN ICONIUM

Acts 14:5 introduces Gentiles who joined with the Jews in opposition to the preaching of the apostles. The Gentiles, especially the "God-fearers," were usually receptive to the gospel; but the incident in Iconium shows there were notable exceptions.

The Sequence of Events at Iconium

Upon the successful preaching of the gospel in the synagogue, the unbelieving Jews began to poison the minds of the Gentiles. This is an instance of Jewish agitation leading to Roman action.

How did the Jews accomplish this? They did so by asserting to the Romans that Christianity was an illicit religion. The Romans had a rather generous policy toward various religions in the Empire. If the religion was non-threatening to Roman government and especially the Pax Romana, they were termed "religio licita"; if they were threatening, they were "religio illicita." Judaism was in the former class and thus enjoyed freedom. In the early days, Christianity was viewed as a segment of Judaism and was also safe from civil intrusion.

The unbelieving Jews attempted to make Christians appear to be opponents of the laws of Rome in order to bring persecution upon them. This was done in Philippi (Acts 16:19-21) and in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-8) and in Corinth (Acts 18:12-13).

The word *therefore* that opens verse 3 is interesting when we observe its connection to verse 2. The bitterness of the Gentiles, which was instigated by the Jews, did not result in a curtailed witness; it drove Paul to a greater reliance on the Lord and an intensified witness. The bitterness of the opposition elicited a gracious ministry on the part of the apostles.

Verse 5 describes a plan to kill the apostles. The word translated *attempt* is *horma* and means *impulse*. It is used of an action that is not controlled by reason. The English word *plot* helps capture the idea. When the news of the plot reaches the apostles, they flee the city. God protects His own, but His own must use the necessary means to protect themselves; here the situation demands flight.

The only description of the physical appearance of Paul exists in an account of what may have happened near Iconium. A tract known as “The Acts of Paul and Thecla,” which focuses on Paul’s ministry at Iconium, says Paul was “a man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness; for now he appeared like a man, and now he had the face of an angel.” While interesting, we must remember this does not bear the authority of the word of God, only that of a document that circulated around A.D. 185.

Evangelizing Lystra 14:8-18

The Miracle 14:8-10

“And at Lystra there was sitting a certain man, without strength in his feet, lame from his mother’s womb, who had never walked. ⁹This man was listening to Paul as he spoke, who, when he had fixed his gaze upon him, and had seen that he had faith to be made well, ¹⁰said with a loud voice, ‘Stand upright on your feet.’ And he leaped up and began to walk.”

With Paul’s arrival in Lystra, we find a crowd of people not yet seen in Acts. Upon arrival on Cyprus, Paul went to the Jewish synagogue to preach (Acts 13:5). In Antioch he addressed those in the synagogue as “Men of Israel, and you who fear God (Acts 13:16).” The *God fearers* were Gentiles who were attracted to Judaism because of its monotheism and high standards of ethics. Now at Lystra, where there is no mention of a synagogue. Paul gains response from what verse 11 describes as *the multitudes*. The new audience is a purely pagan crowd.

Luke intends this healing incident to take our minds back to the temple healing of Acts 3. The healing by Peter recorded in Acts 3:1-10 was the occasion for the first preaching of the gospel after the day of Pentecost—it was a “door opening” event.

There are three linguistic links tying Acts 3:1-10 to Acts 14:8-10. First, the words *lame from his mother’s womb* (3:2 and 14:8) are identical in both cases. Second, the participle *fixed his gaze upon him* (3:4 and 14:9) is the same single word. Third, the words *walking* (3:9) and *began to walk* (14:10) both translate the same Greek verb.

While the words used in the two accounts are the same, the sequel to each event is dramatically different. With the healing of the man in Acts 3, many came to believe in Christ; and the messengers went to jail. With the healing of the man in Acts 14, however, the mes-

sengers were treated as though they were deities. In Acts 3, the miracle brought good results; in Acts 14 it brought bad results.

The Reaction 14:11-13

“And when the multitudes saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, ‘The gods have become like men and have come down to us.’¹² And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.¹³ And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.”

Paul and Barnabas were identified in terms of pagan religion. Zeus was the chief god of the Greek pantheon; Hermes was the herald of the gods. The KJV has Jupiter instead of Zeus and Mercurius instead of Hermes. This follows an old custom of replacing Greek proper nouns with their Latin equivalents in English translations from the Greek. The desire of the pagan priests will be thwarted by the apostles.

An incidental point might be noted: Miracles did not always produce good results. They were never intended to glorify the human instrument, but here they did. This was the fear expressed by Peter in Acts 3:12 when he says, “Why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we have made him walk?”

The Sermon 14:14-18

“But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out¹⁵ and saying, ‘Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you in order that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them.’¹⁶ And in the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways;¹⁷ and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.’¹⁸ And even saying these things, they with difficulty restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them.”

Paul's approach in this brief sermon is unique. At Antioch his approach was through Scripture. Recall its abundant use in Acts 13:16ff, 27, 29, 33, 35, and 41. Later on at Athens, his “door of entry” will be Greek philosophy (Acts 17:22-23). Now in Lystra, he will appeal to natural revelation (Acts 14:17).

What is natural revelation? Natural revelation is that which may be learned of God from His created works. It assumes the truth that the universe is the result of the creative act of a real and personal God. Its antithesis is atheistic evolution, which teaches the earth is the result of a process rather than the act of a person. The key passage on the elements of natural revelation is Psalm 19:1-7.

THE CORRECTION OF THEIR VIEW OF THE APOSTLES 14:15

• As to Their Person

Though occupying the highest office, that of apostle, they remain to be but men. The term *same nature* means of *similar feelings and circumstances*. Paul and Barnabas lived in the same world as those who were attempting to deify them.

• As to Their Message

The preaching of the gospel was their mission. In the preaching of that message, there was call away from the folly of polytheism and to the one true God. They called men from polytheism to monotheism.

THE CORRECTION OF THEIR VIEW OF GOD 14:16-18

• As to His Longsuffering 14:16

Paul's words are a terse expression of the history of man; it is one of "permitted (ing) all the nations to go their own ways." This is a key to the Christian interpretation of human history. Man, in his own pursuits apart from God, explains the shambles of war, poverty, hatred, envy, exploitation, greed, and other sins ad infinitum. Through it all, God has been patient in order that men might have opportunity for repentance (II Peter 3:9) though that opportunity is most often unseen (Romans 2:4).

• As to His Common Grace 14:17

Common grace means God gives good things to all men irrespective of their personal salvation. Rain falls on the just and the unjust alike. This too is intended to call man's attention to God's common goodness so they may come to appropriate His special grace manifested in Christ and proclaimed in the gospel.

Coming Back to Antioch 14:19-28***The Stoning of Paul 14:19-20***

"But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. ²⁰But while the disciples stood around him, he arose and entered the city. And the next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe."

The journey from Antioch had begun sometime in April of A.D. 47 and is about to come to a completion in September of A.D. 48. The depth and intensity of Jewish hatred is obvious. Antioch was a hundred miles west of Lystra. Considering the times in which Paul lived, this was no small journey. Only the most intense hatred would drive one that distance.

The pattern of persecution was typical. At its root was Jewish hatred for Paul, and its fruit was manifested in their agitation of all potential enemies of Paul. The stoning of Paul at Lystra was a once-in-a-lifetime event as II Corinthians 11:25 shows. The marks left by

the stoning are called the “brand-marks of Jesus” in Galatians 6:17. Paul regarded the suffering he experienced in the Galatian churches to be normative for all believers (II Timothy 3:10-12).

Verse 19 reveals the fickle nature of the Galatian population. The Jews *won over the multitudes* (of Lystra) who had so recently treated Paul and Barnabas as though they were gods. They moved from the desire to worship to the determination to kill in a very short time. On recent occasion, they hailed Paul and Barnabas as deities, and now they wish to stone them as impostors. The fickle nature of the Galatians is lamented by Paul in Galatians 4:12-16; and their spiritual insensitivity is recalled as he exclaims, “You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified (Galatians 3:1)?”

Does verse 20 describe a miracle? We do not know, but it seems hardly a normal circumstance to be left for dead and then appear in the city the next day ready for a journey on to Derbe. If a miracle was not involved, special divine enablement certainly was.

The Follow-up of Paul 14:21-23

“And after they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and Antioch, ²²strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.’ ²³And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”

Paul’s follow-up of recent converts revolves about four major concepts. First is the importance of maintaining strength through doctrine. The participle *encouraging* explains how the *strengthening* is accomplished. It may be taken as a participle of means—*by encouraging*. The noun *faith* has a definite article with it, indicating a body of truth that is to be believed.

Next, Paul teaches the reality of pressure in the Christian life. The word *tribulations* conveys the ideas of quantity and variety—much pressure and all kinds of pressure. This is the “cross before the crown” teaching of the New Testament.

The appointment of elders shows the need for continuity of leadership in each local assembly. The words *in every church* teach the autonomy of each local assembly. Every one is individually responsible to the Lord for its testimony in the city in which it is located.

Finally, verse 23 reveals the importance of committal to the faithfulness of the Lord in caring for His own people. Leadership is important, but the Lord remains faithful no matter what the human element may be.

The Report of Paul 14:24-28

“And they passed through Pisidia and came into Pamphylia. ²⁵And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia; ²⁶and from there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished. ²⁷And when they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. ²⁸And they spent a long time with the disciples.”

Geography helps us see the continuity of Paul's preaching. Phrygia is directly south of Pisidia, and Pamphylia was south of Phrygia. Paul preached down every road he traveled. We do not know the nature of Paul's visit to Attalia. The seaports of antiquity were often satellites of larger and more significant inland cities. Luke may be giving us the port of embarkation for the journey back to Antioch. One recalls that they departed Antioch through the seaport of Seleucia (Acts 13:4). If this is true, Attalia was simply a port through which Paul and Barnabas passed.

When Paul arrives back in Antioch, major emphasis is given to the commission of God to the work that they had accomplished. They had been *commended* (handed over) by the church, and it was God who had worked through them, and it was God who had opened doors for them. The first missionary journey was no humanly propelled enterprise. This will be a point of prime importance in chapter 15 where the issue of the legitimacy of Paul's mission and message to the Gentiles is called in question. The Jerusalem council was postlude to the first journey and prelude to the second.

The Jerusalem Conference

or “Is Believing Sufficient to Save?”

Acts 15:1-16:5

THE OUTLINE

- A. The Occasion for the Council 15:1-5
 - 1. The Contention 15:1
 - 2. The Dissension 15:2
 - 3. The Journey 15:3-5
- B. The Debate of the Council 15:6-11
 - 1. The General Debate of All 15:6-7a
 - 2. The Specific Response of Peter 15:7b-11
- C. The Decision of the Council 15:12-21
 - 1. Based Upon Further Testimony 15:12
 - 2. Based on Final Testimony 15:13-21
- D. The Decree of the Council 15:22-29
 - 1. The Delegation 15:22
 - 2. The Disavowal 15:23-24
 - 3. The Commendation 15:25-26
 - 4. The Affirmation 15:27-29
- E. The Proclamation of the Council 15:30-16:5
 - 1. Its Reception at Antioch 15:30-35
 - 2. Its Reception in Syria and Cilicia 15:36-41
 - 3. Its Reception in Galatia 16:1-5

THE COMMENTARY

The council of apostles at Jerusalem may be said to be the most significant event in church history pertaining to the purity of the gospel. The issue is simple: Upon what terms may one be saved?

While the account of the meeting of this council is included with the first missionary journey, we have chosen to treat it as a unit by itself, picking up in Acts 16:6 with the second missionary journey.

THE OCCASION FOR THE COUNCIL 15:1-5

The Contention 15:1

"And some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.'"

The men who came from Judea were correct in believing that men needed to be saved and that the way of salvation was determined by Scripture. They probably did not question the necessity of faith. Their error centered in the denial of the sufficiency of faith alone to secure one's salvation.

These Judean teachers are probably the same as those who were said to come from James in Galatians 2:12. They taught error concerning how to enter into salvation (15:1) and also introduced error on how to live after one is saved (15:5). The sad success of their teaching is manifested in the churches of Galatia where there was an eclipse of grace salvation, grace living, and grace teaching.

The Old Testament was abundantly clear in showing that Gentiles would share in the promises made to Israel in terms of salvation. Peter referred to this in his sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:39) and in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:35). However, the Jews erroneously believed that Gentiles could obtain salvation only through the institutions of Judaism. Proselytes to Judaism had to undergo rituals such as circumcision to become part of the nation and thus saved. This is the issue to be resolved in this most important church council.

The Dissension 15:2

"And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue."

The Intensity of the Discussion

The word translated *dissension* is *stasis*, a word used of riot and revolution. It is used in Mark 15:7 to describe the action of Barabbas who "in the insurrection (*stasis*) committed murder." This reveals

the intensity of the word. The word *debate* may refer to an investigation or a controversy or a discussion. The words *not a little* show its intensity.

The Outcome of the Discussion

The discussion led to a proposal to send Paul and Barnabas, along with others, to Jerusalem. Paul's preaching en route to Jerusalem shows that he had no doubts in his own mind concerning salvation by faith for the Gentiles. Paul did not go to Jerusalem seeking answers; he went to forcefully and effectively present his case. Paul did not gain information at Jerusalem; he went to Jerusalem to gain support for the truth of the gospel.

The Journey 15:3-5

En route 15:3

"Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren."

The believers of Phoenicia and Samaria gave Paul full support in preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. The *conversion of the Gentiles* of which Paul spoke means they came to salvation without imposition of any Jewish proselyte requirements. Paul did not suspend his thinking concerning gentile salvation while waiting for the opinion of the elders at Jerusalem.

Upon Arrival 15:4-5

"And when they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. ⁵But certain ones of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed, stood up, saying, 'It is necessary to circumcise them, and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses.' "

It is probably best to distinguish the groups here. The Judaizers are described by Paul in Galatians 2:4 as *false brethren*, meaning they were not believers. The group spoken of here as *Pharisees who had believed* probably refers to those who lent support to the Judaizers.

The Judaizers argued that the gentile converts must be circumcised as per Genesis 17:9-11 and that they must be instructed to keep the Law. The impersonal verb *it is necessary* is the same word used by Jesus in reminding Nicodemus of the necessity of the new birth. The Judaizers were not demanding circumcision as a concession, but as an absolute necessity for salvation.

THE DEBATE OF THE COUNCIL 15:6-11

The General Debate of All 15:6-7a

"And the apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.

⁷And after there had been much debate..."

The council was made up of apostles and elders from both Jerusalem and Antioch plus the Judaizers and their sympathizers. The discussion was heated, but the words spoken are not given. The focal point of the council will be upon the historical testimony of Peter, Paul, and Barnabas.

The Specific Response of Peter 15:7b-11

Peter's Appointment 15:7b

"...Peter stood up and said to them, 'Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.' "

Peter's speech is critical in the resolution of the problem of gentile salvation. It takes the form of a historical narrative concerning events that have recently taken place.

Peter reaches back about ten years to his calling to the house of Cornelius as recorded in Acts 10. Peter had gone to the house of Cornelius only because God had directed him to do so (Acts 10:28-29). The precedent for taking the gospel to the Gentiles on a grace basis was set by God Himself. Based on this divine initiative, no one could call Paul's preaching to the Gentiles a deviation from the will of God. The fundamental issue the council was facing had been settled ten years before their meeting!

Peter's Witness 15:8-9

" 'And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; ⁹and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.' "

The Holy Spirit had fallen upon the Gentiles while they were listening to Peter. (See Acts 10:44 where the Holy Spirit *interrupted* Peter's preaching to save those who listened with believing ears). The Holy Spirit fell on those Gentiles who believed before they even had an opportunity to confess that faith. God needed nothing to call His attention to their faith—He saw it before they said it!

Thus the argument of Peter—if faith is all God required of the Gentiles, how dare we insist on more? If God made no distinction between Jew and Gentile, we may not make one either.

Peter's Conclusion 15:10-11

" 'Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to

bear? ¹¹*But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they are.*’ ”

The yoke that the Judaizers would place on the Gentiles was not only inconsistent but unbearable. To *test* God is to try His patience by requiring further evidence than that which He has already so plainly given (Deuteronomy 6:16; Isaiah 7:12).

God had required only faith of the Gentiles. To add to this is to sin against God Himself by implying His requirements were inadequate and insufficient.

THE DECISION OF THE COUNCIL 15:12-21

Based Upon Further Testimony 15:12

“And all the multitude kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.”

Reference to the silence of the assembly means the turning point is near—a conclusion is about to be reached. Jerusalem had resisted the act of Peter in taking the gospel to the house of Cornelius; but the resistance was now to come to a formal end, opening the door for the gospel to make its westward progress to the gentile lands. Paul’s testimony validates that of Peter. Paul’s report was not concerning his successes but focuses on how God had responded to the faith of the Gentiles. By God’s acts, He revealed His will.

Based on Final Testimony 15:13-21

James’s Summary of Peter’s Testimony 15:13-14

“And after they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, ‘Brethren, listen to me. ¹⁴Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name.’ ”

First, James notes that the events described by Peter were *initiated* by God. Peter had not described a movement propelled forward by himself or by any other man or group. This all implies the pleasure of God over what was happening. Second, the events described by Peter represented an *expansion* by God.

There is one word in verse 14 that is very common in the Old Testament but is now given a meaning it never had before. It is the word *people*, and this is its first application to Gentiles. The word *laos* in the LXX was consistently used of Israel, now of Gentiles as well.

James’s Summary of Amos’s Prophecy 15:15-18

“ ‘And with this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written, ¹⁶“After these things I will return, and I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen, and I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it,

¹⁷in order that the rest of mankind may see the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name," ¹⁸says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old.' "

The Jews had thought of gentile conversion in terms of the proselyte model requiring circumcision and submission to the Law. James now shows that this model is not the biblical one and does so by quoting from the prophet Amos.

James sees two peoples in the prophecy, restored Israel (15:16) and called Gentiles (15:17-18). The passage is eschatological, focusing on the end times in which David's tent will be rebuilt. Restored Israel will be the core about which Messianic blessings fall upon the Gentiles who, though blessed through Israel, will maintain their own national entity.

James is not interpreting the events narrated by Peter to be a fulfillment of Amos's prophecy, but he does argue that gentile conversion is in harmony with the revealed will of God concerning the future.

James's Summary of His Own Convictions 15:19-21

" 'Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, ²⁰but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood. ²¹For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath.' "

All attempts to impose circumcision or Jewish legal obligations must be refused. The way of salvation and the terms of church fellowship are to be the same for Jew and Gentile alike.

Some teach that what circumcision was to Israel is what baptism is to the church. If this were true, this would be a perfect time for James to say so, but he does not; nor does Paul make any such connection in Romans or Galatians. If Paul had believed that baptism superseded circumcision, his circumcision of Timothy would have been nonsense (Acts 16:3).

In verses 20-21 James proposes a letter summarizing the decision of the council. Jews had been taught to avoid Gentiles because of their pagan practices. These involved idolatrous worship, sexual perversion, and eating practices that followed pagan lines. The prohibitions found in verse 20 had nothing to do with Jewish practice but refer to the habits of paganism. Care in this area would smooth the way for table fellowship among Jewish and gentile Christians.

THE DECREE OF THE COUNCIL 15:22-29

The Delegation 15:22

"Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas — Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren..."

The council agreed with the judgment of James and now affirms it by a letter. The delegation sent to deliver it was made up of Paul and Barnabas plus two leaders from the church at Jerusalem. The status of these men, their eyewitness testimony to the proceedings of the meetings, and their ability to express the questions and emotions that had been present would serve to bring about the acceptance of the decision.

The Disavowal 15:23-24

"...and they sent this letter by them, 'The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings. ²⁴Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls...' "

The decision of the council did several things. First, it freed the gospel from association with Judaism and its institutions. Second, the decision of the council solidified the opposition of the Judaizers. As the letter opens, those oriented to the grace of God in salvation disavow and disown those who had gone to Antioch with a message of confusion and legalism. The legalists from Jerusalem were unauthorized in their earlier mission to the church at Antioch.

The Commendation 15:25-26

" '...it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.' "

Not only were the unauthorized messengers rejected, but Paul and Barnabas were highly commended for their sacrificial ministry in the cause of Christ.

The Affirmation 15:27-29

" 'Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth. ²⁸For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: ²⁹that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell.' "

Far from being merely the decision of the council, it was the will of God Himself and affirmed by the Holy Spirit. The mention of the Holy Spirit shows the council was merely the agent in reflecting the will of God in the matter.

The Gentiles are to avoid needless offense to the Jews. This may be done by observing the four prohibitions that are listed. All four are part of pagan idolatry; and while common among the Gentiles, they were offensive to the Jews.

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE COUNCIL 15:30-16:5

Its Reception at Antioch 15:30-35

The Letter Encouraged 15:30-31

"So, when they were sent away, they went down to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. ³¹And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement."

The letter was not taken as a license to live as they pleased. The word translated *encouragement* also carries the idea of exhortation.

The Letter Unified 15:32-33

"And Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message. ³³And after they had spent time there, they were sent away from the brethren in peace to those who had sent them out."

The teaching of the word of God, which was initiated by the arrival of the letter, brought about a unified spirit (*peace*) among the believers of Antioch. Doctrinal agreement was the source of a new harmony in the church.

The Letter Motivated 15:34-35

"[But it seemed good to Silas to remain there.] ³⁵But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching, with many others also, the word of the Lord."

Verse 34 is a textual problem. Many old and good manuscripts do not contain these words. They were probably put here in order to show why Silas appears again at Antioch in verse 40. At the same time, they seem to be a clear contradiction of verse 33. It seems very doubtful that it is part of the original text.

Its Reception in Syria and Cilicia 15:36-41

The delivery of the letter to this area marks the beginning of the second missionary journey. It will touch the major Greek cities of Athens, Corinth, and Ephesus. This missionary enterprise will extend far west of the territory covered on the first journey. New personnel accompany Paul; Silas and Timothy replace Barnabas.

Beginning at this point in Acts, the preposition *meta* plus a time designation appears. It is seen in expressions such as *after some days*, *after these things*, and *after these days*. This expression marks off the beginning of a new section. With verse 36, Paul takes the initiative for a new missionary journey. The first was initiated by the Holy Spirit; the second was proposed by Paul. There is nothing wrong with this because the first journey had established what the will of the Lord was—world evangelization. With this clear indication of the will of God, no further revelation was needed. This expression also joins the new section with what went before.

The Journey Proposed 15:36

"And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.'"

Paul was aware that once the word of God was proclaimed, two options were open to those who received it. There could be constancy and growth, or there could be vacillation and arrested growth. Paul believed that something needed to be done to insure that the former course would come about.

The Personnel Suggested 15:37

"And Barnabas was desirous of taking John, called Mark, along with them also."

The continuous action expressed by the verb *was desirous* shows the unyielding determination of Barnabas. He would not and did not change his mind. He wanted to take Barnabas before Paul objected, when Paul objected, and after Paul objected. The words *taking...along* do not point to companionship alone; they indicate a co-worker and assistant.

The Plan Opposed 15:38-41

"But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.

³⁹And there arose such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.

⁴⁰But Paul chose Silas and departed, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches."

ITS BASIS 15:38

Paul's objection to taking John Mark on the journey was based on principle, not personality. Paul and Barnabas were two personalities holding two opinions, neither of whom chooses to give in.

Paul and Barnabas never again work together directly as a missionary team. Luke's account is honest—he does not gloss over the disagreement nor does he attempt to assign fault to either man. Human frailty, however, need not limit God's work. What might

have been one missionary journey turned into two because of the disagreement. God's sovereignty extends over man's disagreements.

ITS RESOLUTION 15:39-41

It is worth observing that Mark's good qualities developed in time; and when they did, Paul was quick to recognize them (Philemon 23-24, II Timothy 4:11). God did not set either man aside. Mark will be chosen to author one of the synoptic gospels, and extra-biblical history says he was torn asunder in North Africa for refusing to call Caesar Lord.

Its Reception in Galatia 16:1-5

The Choice of Timothy 16:1-3

"And he came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, ²and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium. ³Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek."

Timothy had become a believer on Paul's first missionary journey (I Timothy 1:2). By now, he had been a Christian for three or four years.

Paul had Timothy circumcised. This should be compared to Galatians 2:3-4 where Paul refused to have Titus circumcised. Is Paul inconsistent? The answer lies in the nature of each case. With Titus, the issue was circumcision as a condition of salvation; with Timothy, it was a matter of circumcision as a means of entry into the Jewish synagogue. Circumcision of Titus would have been compromise; circumcision of Timothy was a matter of expediency.

The Ministry in the Churches 16:4-5

"Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees, which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe. ⁵So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily."

The ministry consisted in proclamation of absolute truth. The word *decrees* is *dogma*, our *dogma* in English. The word *so* introduces the direct results of such a ministry. The church grew both qualitatively and quantitatively. Verse 5 brings to a close another historical block in the book of Acts.

The Second Missionary Journey *or “The Gospel Goes to Europe”*

Acts 16:6-18:22

THE OUTLINE

- A. Evangelizing Philippi 16:6-40
 - 1. The Call 16:6-10
 - 2. The Converts 16:11-40
- B. Evangelizing Thessalonica 17:1-9
 - 1. The Arrival 17:1
 - 2. The Ministry 17:2-4
 - 3. The Riot 17:5-9
- C. Evangelizing Berea 17:10-15
 - 1. The Nobility of Berea 17:10-11
 - 2. The Response of Berea 17:12
 - 3. The Opposition in Berea 17:13
 - 4. The Departure from Berea 17:14-15
- D. Evangelizing Athens 17:16-34
 - 1. The City of Athens 17:16-21
 - 2. The Sermon of Paul 17:22-31
 - 3. The Response of the Athenians 17:32-34
- E. Evangelizing Corinth 18:1-17
 - 1. Paul’s Arrival in Corinth 18:1-4
 - 2. Paul’s Stay in Corinth 18:5-11
 - 3. Paul’s Trial in Corinth 18:12-17

F. Evangelizing Ephesus 18:18-22

1. Paul's Visit to Ephesus 18:18-21
2. Paul's Visit to Palestine 18:22

THE COMMENTARY

Acts 16:6-19:20 is a distinct block of history within the book of Acts. As we have noted, it is part of the style of Luke the historian to mark off blocks of history by concluding each with a summary statement. These are found in 6:7, 9:31, 12:24, 16:5, 19:20, and 28:31. The summary statements are all similar in nature: each one summarizes the progress of the preaching of the gospel.

The section of Acts that we are about to study is characterized by a great emphasis on the direction of the Lord in the progress of the gospel. Acts 16:6-7 is a good example of His negative leading, whereas Acts 16:9-10 illustrates the positive aspect. The Lord says, "Go here" on one occasion; and on another, "Don't go there."

Acts 16:10 begins the first "we" section of the history. It means that Luke was present and participating in the events he now narrates. The major "we" sections are Acts 16:10-17, 20:5-21:18, and 27:1-28:16.

Paul's journey followed the Roman roads that connected the major cities of the Aegean coastline. There were approximately fifty thousand miles of major military roads connected by two hundred thousand miles of good secondary roads. Paul utilized these roads in his evangelistic strategy.

EVANGELIZING PHILIPPI 16:6-40

The Call 16:6-10

The Closed Door 16:6-7

"And they passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia;⁷ and when they had come to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them..."

DO NOT GO TO ASIA 16:6

Paul's plan was to continue evangelizing in Asia. These three verses should not be taken to mean the Holy Spirit was restricting evangelism. The opposite is really true. He is saying, "Don't stop with Asia, go on to Europe, go west, keeping moving to reach the world!" The closed door enlarged their vision to take in the whole world.

DO NOT GO TO BITHYNIA 16:7

How did God inform Paul he was not to go these places? Perhaps by direct voice or maybe through external circumstances that made the trip impossible. Prophets were given to meet needs for revela-

tion before the canon of Scripture was completed, and perhaps a prophet delivered the message. At any rate, the focus is on the fact of God's leading, not the method.

These verses speak of the leading of the *Holy Spirit* (16:6), the *Spirit of Jesus* (16:7), and of *God* (16:10). These expressions could very well point to the embryonic concept of the Trinity present in the early church.

The Open Door 16:8-10

"...and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. ⁹And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a certain man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' ¹⁰And 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."

WHERE PAUL WENT 16:8

Troas was significant in two ways. First, it was the pivotal port between the land masses of Europe and Asia. Second, it linked the great waterways of the Black Sea on the north and the Aegean Sea to the south. It separated east from west, Asia from Europe.

WHAT PAUL SAW 16:9

With this vision, Luke joins the missionary team along with Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Some have tried to identify the man of Macedonia as the Philippian jailer. He was the first convert in Europe; but to identify him with the man of the vision has no support, though it is interesting conjecture.

WHAT PAUL CONCLUDED 16:10

Paul's conclusion is significant. Because of it, the gospel went westward, ultimately reaching imperial Rome.

The Converts 16:11-40

The Conversion of Lydia 16:11-15

PAUL'S ARRIVAL IN PHILIPPI 16:11-12

"Therefore putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis; ¹²and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony; and we were staying in the city for some days."

The first day of sailing took them to Samothrace, a mountainous island reaching five thousand feet above the water. It was a landmark of the northern Aegean Sea. Next they sailed to Neapolis, the port city of Philippi, which was located about ten miles further inland.

Philippi was a *leading city*, which reveals Paul's strategy—go directly to the centers of population. It was also a *colony*, a word

descriptive of the type of government it had. A colony was a reproduction of Rome, a model of the mother government.

PAUL'S WITNESS IN PHILIPPI 16:13-15

•To the Women in General 16:13

"And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled."

There was a very small Jewish population at Philippi. Ten Jewish males were required to have a synagogue. When there was no synagogue, the Jews would often build an enclosure called a *proseucha* near a river. It is at such a meeting place that Paul and his companions met the Jewish women and God-fearing Gentiles. This is the humble and unimposing setting from which the evangelization of Europe begins.

•To a Woman in Particular 16:14-15

"And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. ¹⁵And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.' And she prevailed upon us."

Lydia must have been a businesswoman of some repute. Purple dyeing flourished in Thyatira, and Troas and Philippi were points from which the dyed garments were traded to the West.

She is called a *worshiper of God*, which meant she had rejected the polytheism of the Roman Empire and believed in the true God, the God of Israel. These non-Jews often associated themselves with the synagogue because of its monotheism, high ideals, and simple worship.

Her conversion is simply stated. Paul did his part, *we sat down and began speaking*; and Lydia did her part, *she was listening*; and the Lord did His in that the *Lord opened her heart to respond*. This is the first time in the book of Acts that we are told the Lord opened a heart.

In the book of Acts, baptism is the first act of new converts. The Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:35-38), Cornelius (Acts 10:47-48), Lydia (Acts 16:14-15), and the jailer (Acts 16:30-34) are examples.

The Conversion of the Pythoness 16:16-18

HER CHARACTERISTICS 16:16

"And it happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a certain slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortunetelling."

The word *divination* is *pythona* (*pythoness*), which means inspired by Apollo, the god who was worshiped as the Phythian god at the

shrine of Delphi. In the Septuagint, this word is used to describe those who had a *familiar spirit*, such as the witch of Endor. Apollo was associated with giving of oracles, and the girl was therefore sought out by those who wished to have their fortune told.

The slave-girl was not insane, she was not fraudulent, she was demon-possessed. As a result, she was misused by her masters.

HER CONFESSION 16:17

"Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, 'These men are bondservants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation.' "

The screaming of the demon-possessed girl recalls the activity of demons during Jesus' earthly ministry (Mark 1:24, 3:11, 5:7; Luke 4:34, 41; 8:28).

The title *Most High God* was a common denominator among Jews and Gentiles for the supreme ruler of the universe. El Elyon was used by the Greeks of Zeus; it was also used of Yahweh by the Hebrews.

HER DELIVERY 16:18

"And she continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, 'I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!' And it came out at that very moment."

Paul was probably annoyed because the words of the demon-possessed girl were getting a better hearing than the message of the gospel.

The superior authority that the demons recognized in Jesus was also recognized in His apostles. The verb *I command* is the same word that was used for transmitting military commands. When the demon went out, the girl's fortunetelling ability left. When that left, hope of material gain vanished. When Paul exorcised the demon from the girl, he also exorcised her master's source of income.

The Conversion of the Jailer 16:19-40

THE SETTING 16:19-24

•The Charge 16:19-21

"But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities,²⁰ and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, 'These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews,²¹ and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans.' "

There are only two recorded attacks by Gentiles on the apostles in the book of Acts (here and in 19:23-28). In each case, it was because the gospel threatened their property interests.

Here is the first charge that Paul and Silas were proclaiming a *religio illicita* (unlawful religion). There were laws prohibiting foreign religious propaganda among Roman citizens. Hitherto, Christianity had been held to be part of Judaism and thus *religio licita* (lawful religion).

Christianity turned people from the gods of Rome and was regarded as atheistic. It was one thing for a Jew to live as a Jew; it was another for a Roman to adopt Jewish customs. This interfered with service in the army as well as ceremonies connected with public state worship. The sting of verse 21 lies in the words *being Romans*. All of this triggered the uprising about to be described.

• Humiliation 16:22-24

"And the crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them, and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. ²³And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; ²⁴and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison, and fastened their feet in the stocks."

The preachers of the gospel were first stripped naked and were then beaten with rods. Roman magistrates often had assistants called lictors to carry out their orders. These men carried as symbols of their office bundles of rods with an ax bound in their midst. It symbolized their right to inflict corporal punishment, even to the extent of death. The bundle was called the *fasces* and is the origin of the word *fascist*. Paul was beaten with rods on three occasions (II Corinthians 11:25).

They were next put in prison. There is a difference between the *prison* of verse 23 and the *inner prison* of verse 24. The prison was built on the side of a steep hill; the inner prison was the part excavated deep into the side of the hill. The missionaries were placed there naked, with backs bleeding.

When placed in the inner prison, they were also fastened in stocks. This was an additional precaution and an extra degree of humiliation imposed upon them. Stocks often had more than two holes for the legs. This meant the legs could be stretched apart to cause the utmost pain. It was not the jailer's business to be concerned about the prisoner's comfort, but rather to make sure he did not escape.

THE DELIVERY 16:25-34

• Of the Prisoners 16:25-27

The Songs 16:25

"But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them..."

The reaction of Paul and Silas to the mistreatment is eloquent testimony to their dedication to the cause of Christ. The beating, the imprisonment, and the stocks were not intended to bring joy. Praise and worship and hymns are not jail sounds!

Tertullian later said in *To the Martyrs*, “The legs feel nothing in the stocks when the heart is in heaven.” It may be that the songs sung in prison were a greater miracle than the earthquake that shook it open.

The Earthquake 16:26

“...and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s chains were unfastened.”

See commentary on the opening of prison gates in chapter 5.

•Of the Jailer 16:27-34

His Discipline 16:27-29

“And when the jailer had been roused out of sleep and had seen the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Do yourself no harm, for we are all here!’ ²⁹And he called for lights and rushed in and, trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas...”

The jailer believed the worst had happened—the doors were open and the prisoners had escaped. Because of his position as a Roman soldier and his ideas concerning duty and discipline, he thought his only recourse was suicide. The Code of Justinian said a soldier who allowed a prisoner to escape was liable to the same punishment the prisoner would have suffered—thus, the urgent need for Paul to assure him that all the prisoners were still there.

His question 16:30

“...and after he brought them out, he said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ ”

Where had the jailer heard about being saved? The most likely answer is found in Acts 16:17 where we are told that Paul had been proclaiming *the way of salvation* in the city of Philippi. His natural ideas about how to be saved would revolve about doing good works. The verb *do* is present tense, which indicates ongoing and habitual action. “What must I keep on doing—what habit must I form—to be saved?”

His answer 16:31

“And they said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household.’ ”

The reply takes the form of an aorist tense verb. The decisive action of the command to *believe* stands in contrast to the repeated action verb *do* found in the jailer’s question. Faith directed to the proper object brings salvation. The answer of the missionaries is as simple and straightforward as it can possibly be.

Does this verse teach “household salvation”? If one member of a family becomes a Christian, may he claim the salvation of the rest

of his family? Acts 16:31 does not teach this. It rather says your household may be saved the same way you are saved, that is, by believing on Christ. Verse 32 pictures the jailer and his family believing and being saved just as promised.

His Conversion 16:32-34

"And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. ³³And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household. ³⁴And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household."

For instances of conversion of members of a household along with the head of the house, see Acts 11:14, 18:8, and I Corinthians 16:15. Verse 32 is probably a fuller explanation of the way of salvation in terms the jailer, a Roman, would clearly understand.

The jailer washed the wounds of Paul and Silas just as the saving message of the gospel had washed his sins away by faith in Christ. The fellowship of the jailer, Paul, and Silas shows the unifying effect of a common faith in Christ. It is a true miracle of God's grace: flogging to fellowship!

THE EXPULSION 16:35-40

•The Plan 16:35-36

"Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, 'Release those men.' ³⁶And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, 'The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Now therefore, come out and go in peace.'"

The policemen were called *rabdouchos*, which means *stick* or *stick-bearers*. These men served the magistrates in three ways. First, they prepared the way for him in his movements. Second, they carried out punishments for him. Third, they delivered summons for him, which is probably the function being carried out here.

•The Protest 16:37

"But Paul said to them, 'They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out.'"

Paul and Silas were both Roman citizens, and their citizenship rights had been flagrantly violated. The charge brought against them had not been investigated, and they had been imprisoned and beaten illegally. A Roman citizen claimed his legal rights by saying, "Cuius Romanus sum"—"I am a Roman citizen." At any rate, Paul's words recorded in this verse turn the tables.

•The Problem 16:38-40

"And the policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. And they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans, ³⁹and they came

and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city.⁴⁰ And they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed."

The word from Paul was disconcerting. They abused Paul and Silas who were as much Roman citizens as they. If a complaint of such treatment reached Rome, the repercussions for the officials at Philippi could be serious.

This incident is important because we will find Paul exercising his rights as a Roman citizen many times in the following chapters. Paul will soon exercise the ultimate right of the citizen, i.e., the right to appeal to Caesar. It will be this appeal that will bring Paul to imperial Rome in the closing chapters of Acts.

EVANGELIZING THESSALONICA 17:1-9

The Arrival 17:1

"Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews."

The participle *traveled through* means to take the road through, and that road was the Appian Way. Amphipolis straddled it; so did Apollonia and likewise, Thessalonica. Roman roads extended from Britain to the Persian Gulf for almost a quarter of a million miles. These roads literally paved the way for the spread of the gospel.

The city of Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia and was its largest and most prosperous city. It had a population of nearly 200,000 people

While the synagogue did hold services during the week, the Sabbath was the major meeting. According to Acts 17:11 and 19:9, it was the habit of Paul to speak in the synagogue on a daily basis. Upon arrival in each new town, Paul went to the synagogue first with the gospel and then turned to the Gentiles. To the Jew first (chronologically) and then, upon their frequent rejection, he turned to the Gentiles. The Jewish pattern was rejection; the Gentile pattern was acceptance.

The Ministry 17:2-4

Its Nature 17:2-3

"And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures,³ explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.' "

PAUL PREACHED BY REASONING WITH THEM

The verb translated *reasoned* is *dalegomai*, a word that contains two fundamental ideas. First, it means to *minge thought with thought*.

Second, it carries the idea of mental stimulation. It is used thirteen times in the New Testament, ten of which describe the activity of Paul, all found in the book of Acts.

It is translated *reason*(ed) or (ing) in Acts 17:2, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8-9. In Acts 20:7 and 9 it is translated with the English word *talking*. In Acts 24:12 and 25 it is translated *discussion*.

PAUL PREACHED BY EXPLAINING THE SCRIPTURES

The word *explaining* in Acts 17:3 is *dianoigo*. This verb has a literal meaning *to open*, as in Luke 2:23, and a figurative meaning *to make understanding and reception possible*, as in Luke 24:32. We have an English expression for insight—"That was a real eye-opener."

This verb was used for the restoration of hearing (Mark 7:34), for the birth of a child (Luke 2:23), for the parting of the skies (Acts 7:56). The figurative meaning refers to opening one's mind to the recognition, explanation, and understanding of Scripture (Luke 24:31-32, 45). Acts 16:14 uses it to describe divine activity in enabling response to truth. It is used here in Acts 17 for the oral explanation of the objective revelation of the word of God.

PAUL PREACHED BY GIVING EVIDENCE

The Greek word translated *giving evidence* is *paratithami*, which means *to set before*, as in serving food (Mark 6:41, 8:6). Figuratively used, it means *to present teaching*, as in Matthew 13:31 and here in Acts 17:3.

Paul set forth two vital truths. First, he taught what the Messiah would do and, second, who the Messiah was—Jesus.

Its Results 17:4

The ministry of Paul was one of proclamation/persuasion preaching. See Acts 13:38, 43; 17:2-4; 18:4, 19; 19:8-9 for examples. Thessalonica is the first instance of prominent people becoming Christians.

The Riot 17:5-9

The Tactics of the Opposition 17:5

"But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and coming upon the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people."

This verse reveals the common tactic of the Jewish opponents of Christianity in Acts—persecution through agitation. The Jews constantly incited others and poisoned their minds against the Apostles. See Acts 13:50; 14:2, 19; and 17:5 for examples.

The *wicked men* spoken of were called *agorians*, *men of the market place*. They were street people who were loafers and gangsters. A full account of the opposition is found in the letter of I Thessalonians.

The Accusations of the Opposition 17:6-9

"And when they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, 'These men who have upset the world have come here also; ⁷and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.'⁸And they stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things. ⁹And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them."

First, the apostles were accused of violating the Pax Romana, the "Roman peace." Second, they advocated a king other than Caesar. The word *king* is *basileus* and was used to describe the Roman emperor (John 19:15), and the Jews charge that Christians applied the same word to Jesus. Christians did not refuse to call the emperor *basileus* or to recognize his authority as I Peter 2:13 and 17 make clear.

Paul was unable to return to Thessalonica once he was expelled, and this is referred to in I Thessalonians 2:17-18.

A few observations on the evangelization of Thessalonica are in order. First, divine leading does not preclude careful planning. Paul followed the best roads to the most populous areas. Second, true preaching demands mental and volitional interaction with the word of God. Paul's preaching methods make this clear. Third, preaching that brings salvation is always Christocentric. Paul focuses on who the Messiah was and how Jesus filled that office. Fourth, any and all opposition to the free spread of the word of God is Satanic in its source (I Thessalonians 2:18). Finally, religion is the enemy of true Christianity, as seen in the book of Acts—and always.

EVANGELIZING BEREIA 17:10-15**The Nobility of Berea 17:10-11**

"And the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea; and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. ¹¹Now these 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 Bereans are described as *noble-minded*. This translates the single Greek word *eugenias*, which literally means *well born*—our English expression "blue blood." It was used of one who was of the king's lineage or family. It is used figuratively here of those whose minds were kingly in a spiritual sense. There are five features of Christian nobility.

Christian Nobility Expressed Itself in Warm Receptivity of the Word of God

There are two distinct Greek words translated *receive* in the New Testament. First, there is *lambano*, which simply means *to take* without implying enthusiasm or pleasure. It could be used of taking something unpleasant such as bitter medicine. Second, there is the word *dechomai*, which means *to take with pleasure, to welcome*. This is the word translated *received* here in Acts 17:11.

The pronoun *they* with the verb *received* is important. It is a Greek qualitative pronoun. It describes people from the standpoint of certain qualities they possess. The Bereans were the kind of people who welcomed God's word. This was their fixed disposition.

Christian Nobility Was Eager with Regard to the Word of God

The Bereans did not have a "ho-hum" attitude toward God's word. They were aggressive students of the Scriptures. They did not have to be pushed; they pursued for themselves.

Christian Nobility Was Meticulous in Examining the Word of God

The word *examining* is *diakrino* and means *to sift through, to engage in careful and exact research*. It was a Greek technical term for legal research. In Acts 24:1-8 the lawyer Tertullus tells Felix that *by examining him* (Paul) *yourself*, he will come to certain conclusions. The Bereans were noble because they researched the Scriptures.

Christian Nobility Maintained Daily Regularity in the Word of God

Their searching of the word *daily* establishes this point. Every new point that Paul made was carefully compared to the word of God as it existed then.

Christian Nobility Verified All Teaching by Reference to the Word of God

The Bereans operated as Isaiah had spoken. "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn (enlightenment)." (Isaiah 8:20)

The Response of Berea 17:12

"Many of them therefore believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men."

The connective *therefore* ties the careful investigation of verse 11 to the faith born in verse 12. This teaches that a careful investigation of the Scriptures will bring a person to faith. Most men and women who reject Christian doctrine have never examined it.

The Opposition in Berea 17:13

"But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there likewise, agitating and stirring up the crowds."

The opposition to the word of God did not come from fellow Bereans but from Thessalonica where Paul had just been. The focal point of the opposition centered about the word of God and its proclamation.

The Departure from Berea 17:14-15

"And then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there. ¹⁵Now those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed."

Paul now puts some three hundred miles between himself and the opposition. We should not forget about the Thessalonian Jews, however, for they will surface once again and create great problems for Paul as we shall see in Acts 21.

Paul wrote letters to many of the churches after they were established, such as Philippi, Thessalonica, etc. An apostolic letter almost always implied a problem or need within the church to which it was written. There is no such letter to the church at Berea because none was needed. Why was there no need? Because they practiced Christian nobility and searched the Scriptures daily, and the attitude apparently prevailed for years after Paul's visit.

EVANGELIZING ATHENS 17:16-34

Silas and Timothy remain at Berea, and Paul is escorted to Athens (Acts 17:14-15) where he awaits their arrival. The city of Athens was apparently not on the agenda of places he intended to visit. The persecution of the Jews had made it necessary to flee Thessalonica (Acts 17:9). It is at this point that Paul leaves the Appian way and heads for Berea (an "off the beaten path" town). The opponents from Thessalonica come to Berea and cause great trouble there (Acts 17:13). From here Paul is driven three hundred miles south to Athens. Though the opposition is sovereignly used by God, the movements just described were apparently not planned by Paul.

What had Paul's agenda been? His plan had probably been to follow the Appian way across Greece to Dyrrhachium where he could cross the Adriatic to Italy and on to Rome. Rome was his goal, and the opposition that started in Thessalonica prevented that journey. These facts help explain passages such as Romans 1:13 and 15:22-23.

The City of Athens 17:16-21

Its Idolatry 17:16-17

“Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was beholding the city full of idols.¹⁷ So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present.”

Athens was five miles inland from its port city of Piraeus and was named for the goddess Athena. It reached its cultural peak under Pericles from 595 to 429 B.C. During the last fifteen years of his life, the Parthenon and the magnificent temples and buildings were constructed. Literature, philosophy, and science flourished. Politically, Athens became a democracy and attracted intellectuals such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurius, and Zeno.

In 338 B.C. Philip II of Macedon conquered Athens. This was a boon to Greece because Philip’s son carried Greek culture and language around the world—his name was Alexander the Great.

Today when we visit Athens, we can view the work of history’s finest architects and sculptors from the time of Pericles. We see them as nothing more than works of art. In the first century, however, this was not the case. What we may call works of art were temples and images of pagan deities. Pliny says there were thirty thousand public idols in the city; and Petronius comments, “It is easier to find a god than a man.”

All of this had enormous impact on Paul (Acts 17:16). He observed that the Greeks deified everything, including ideas such as beneficence, rumor, shame, and even capacities such as force, earth, and air.

The word *beholding* in verse 16 was used of a touring sightseer. Most authors describe Athens in cultural terms, speaking of the statesmen, philosophers, and artists. Paul, however, sees things in a different light. To him, the city is *full of idols* (*katedolos*, a word used only by Christian writers). The condition did not drive Paul to despair but rather to the proclamation of the truth (Acts 17:17). He taught in the synagogue, the center of Jewish life, and in the market place, the hub of Greek life.

Its Philosophers 17:18-21

“And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. And some were saying, ‘What would this idle babbler wish to say?’ Others, ‘He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,’ —because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.¹⁹ And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, ‘May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming?’²⁰ For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; we want to know therefore what these things mean.’²¹ (Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)”

Greek philosophy is an attempt to come to terms with life apart from divine revelation and the person of Jesus Christ. When Paul entered the market place, he encountered the two major schools of philosophy, the Epicureans and the Stoics.

Stoic is from the Greek word *stoa*, which means *colonnade or portico*, the place where they taught. Their aim was to learn to live consistently with nature. Human reason was their primary emphasis, and individual self-sufficiency was central. Stoics were pantheists, believing that god was the “world-soul.” Politically, they believed in a cosmopolis that eliminated social and national distinctions.

In contrast, the Epicureans believed the chief end of life was pleasure. The chief pleasure in life was conceived as an existence of tranquility, freedom from pain, disturbing passions, and superstition. The existence of gods was not denied, but Epicureans believed they took no interest in the lives of men.

Both systems agreed on one thing: The newfangled message brought by this Jew from Tarsus could not appeal to reasonable men. Paul was described as an *idle babbler*. The Greek word is *spermologos*, which means *seed-picker*. It referred to one who, like a gutter sparrow, picked up bits and scraps of information in the market place. Others viewed Paul in a different way. Picking up on the words *Jesus* (savior or healer) and *resurrection* (restorer), they believed he was the personification of healing and restoration.

The Areopagus was once called the “Council of Ares” and indicated where the court met; but by the time of Paul, it meant the court itself. Its function was to supervise education. It had jurisdiction over visitors like Paul, requiring them to give an account of what they taught. The word survives today as designation of the Greek supreme court.

The appetite of the Athenians for new thoughts and ideas may be illustrated historically by Cleon, a fifth century general, who said, “You are the best people at being deceived by something new that is said.” The orator Demosthenes reproached the people for continually asking for new ideas when Philip II was rising to power.

The Sermon of Paul 17:22-31

Its Features

Three audiences were available for the preaching of the gospel. First was the Jew, the least responsive. Second was the Gentile God-fearer who was the most responsive. Third, there was the pagan who was involved in the idolatry of Paul’s times. This sermon is an example of Paul’s approach to the pagan.

While Paul never compromised content, he did adapt his presentation of truth to the audience at hand. In this sermon, Paul does not quote Scripture unknown to his hearers. His direct quotes are taken from Greek poets. Paul’s argument in the sermon is based on the

concepts of Scripture, showing God as creator (17:24) and God as judge (17:31). Man's ultimate encounter, Paul proclaims, is with Jesus Christ.

Its Content

THE INTRODUCTION 17:22-23

"And Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, 'Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. ²³For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.'"

Paul addresses the Areopagus as Thucydides and Demosthenes did—*Men of Athens*. The address is followed by a simple statement of fact. The single Greek word translated *very religious* is *dasidaimonia*, which has three shades of meaning. First, it has the good sense of *reverence for a deity*. Second, it may carry an unfavorable sense of *superstition*. Finally, it may have an objective sense of religion as in Acts 25:19. The strong religious tendencies of the Athenians is well attested. Sophocles says, "Athens is most pious towards the gods...." Josephus says, "The Athenians are affirmed by all men to be the most religious of the Greeks." Pausanias remarks that "the Athenians venerate the gods more than other men." When Paul observed that they were very religious, he was stating a fact, not paying a compliment.

The theme of his address is the "Unknown God" whom Paul will proclaim as the only true God. Many authors inform us there were numerous altars to unknown gods in Athens. Pausanias in his *Description of Greece* says, "At Athens there are altars of gods called 'unknown.'" Philostratus says, "at Athens where even unknown divinities have altars erected to them."

THE NATURE OF GOD 17:24-28

"The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; ²⁵neither is He served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things; ²⁶and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, ²⁷that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; ²⁸for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are His offspring...'"

• God Is One—"The God"

The proper noun *God* is singular in number. While agreeable to our way of thinking, the concept of one true god conflicted with the whole Greek way of thinking. The beliefs of man concerning deity may be classified four ways. First, the most common viewpoint of human history is polytheism. This is the teaching that there is a

multiplicity of gods. Second, there is pantheism, which says that God is not above and separate from creation but is part of it. Pantheism knows no creator-creation distinction and treats god and nature as one. The believer should be aware that pantheism is rapidly encompassing America. Evidence of this is seen in some of the radical environmentalists and animal rights activists. Third, the henotheist believes in the existence of one god without denying the possible existence of others. Finally, as espoused by Israel in the Old Testament Scriptures, is monotheism, the belief in only one true God. This represents the teaching of the Bible and is the beginning point of all Christian truth.

The ancient world view is this: The divine (nature and all its forces) is over man who lives in fear of the divine.

The biblical world view is this: There is one single, personal, revealed, sovereign God who is over man and over nature. Man is to live in submission to the one loving God, and nature is man's servant and is not to be feared. As Paul addresses Athens, this is his first point.

- God Is Creator—"who made the world and all things in it..."

The Epicureans denied creation and claimed that matter was eternal. Our world, they believed, is the result of a chance collision of atoms. Paul does not argue that there is one God who is creator; he asserts the fact and leaves it there.

- God Is Sovereign—"since He is the Lord of heaven and earth..."

Paul's words are strongly reminiscent of the Old Testament. See in particular Psalm 135:5-7.

- God Is Infinite—"does not dwell in temples made with hands..."

If God is infinite, He cannot be contained in a building. This is true of the one God of the Bible as stated in I Kings 8:27 and Isaiah 66:1-2. Even higher paganism recognized no building could accommodate the divine nature. Euripides said, "What house built by craftsmen could enclose the form divine within enfolding walls?"

How then could the Athenian Acropolis hold gods? If the Athenians continue to believe their shrines hold their gods, they must be small indeed! Or, perhaps, no gods at all!

- God Is Independent—"neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything..."

Euripides said, "God, if he be truly God, has need of nothing." Plato expresses the same concept asking, "What advantage accrues to the gods from what they get from us?" As in all of Paul's entire sermon, biblical thought is at the forefront (see Psalm 50:9-12).

- God Is Life—"since He gives life and breath to all things..."

The Athenians prided themselves on being *autochthonos*, the belief that they had sprung from the soil of Athens. They were the only Greeks on the European mainland who had no tradition of their ancestors coming to Greece. They believed they were different from all other men. Paul argues that there is one mankind coming from one creator-God.

The words *determined the appointed times* refer to epochs of history. It is like saying, "He lived in the times of the horse and buggy." God has determined the boundaries of men's habitation, but why? Verse 27 contains the answer. God has done this in order to demonstrate in history that He is the sovereign God so that men will recognize Him. God is revealed in creation (Romans 1); God is revealed in history (Acts 17:26); God is revealed in man (Acts 17:27-28). Paul shows the Athenians that this is recognized in some of their own literature. Epimenides said, "They fashioned a tomb for thee, O holy and high one—the Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies! But thou art not dead; thou livest and abidest forever; for in thee we live and move and have our being." Aratus said, "In every direction we all have to do with Zeus; for we are also his offspring."

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF MAN 17:29-31

" 'Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. ³⁰Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, ³¹because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.' "

Men are God's offspring, not in the pantheistic sense of the stoics but in the biblical sense of Genesis 1:27 where man is said to be made in the image of God. In worship of idols, man reveals his ignorance of God. God in His mercy has overlooked the times of this ignorance (Acts 14:16, 17:30; Romans 3:25). In each of these passages it is implied that the coming of Jesus Christ provided a fresh start. Men should therefore *repent* (change their minds about idolatry) and come to the true God. Paul now becomes specific about salvation with a focus on Jesus Christ.

The Response of the Athenians 17:32-34

"Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, 'We shall hear of you again concerning this.'³³ So Paul went out of their midst. ³⁴But some men joined him and believed, among whom also was Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them."

Two lessons about basic Christianity had been presented to the pagans of Athens. First, Paul had stressed their own confessed

ignorance of the divine nature. Second, he gave a rather lengthy statement about the nature of the true God. From this, Paul introduces the man of God's appointment, Jesus Christ.

When the court of the Areopagus was founded, these words were spoken by Apollos, "Once a man dies and the earth drinks up his blood, there is no resurrection." With the exception of a small handful, the Athenians went on in their intellectual pride and religious idolatry. No church was founded in Athens, and Paul went on to Corinth never to return.

EVANGELIZING CORINTH 18:1-17

With the evangelization of Corinth, we come to the end of the second missionary journey (Acts 18:22). A significant amount of time passes, as Paul stays in Corinth for a year and a half.

As Paul journeys toward Corinth, much of his humanity shows forth. I Corinthians 2:1-3 tells how he was with them "in weakness and fear and in much trembling." Paul had entered Europe convinced that God had called him there (Acts 16:10). And yet, at Philippi, his first stop, he ended up being beaten and thrown in jail. He left town at the request of the Roman officials. After this, he went to Thessalonica where his friend Jason put up money to guarantee that Paul would not come back to the city (Acts 17:9). After preaching in Berea, the Jews arrived from Thessalonica; and he was escorted out of town and taken three hundred miles south to Athens. Here he spoke of the resurrection of Jesus; and this finished his ministry there, though he was not expelled violently as in many other places. Paul was nearly sick with anxiety over the condition of believers in Thessalonica (I Thessalonians 2:17-18; 3:1, 5-6). While Paul had an open door at Troas, he did not use it because of his deep concern for the Corinthian church (II Corinthians 2:12-13).

Acts 18:1 tells of his arrival in Corinth. This city was strategically located, standing at the junction of the east-west sea routes. The seaport of Lechaem connected the Ionian Sea with the western Mediterranean. The seaport of Cenchrea connected the eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea, standing at the junction of the north-south land routes.

The city was morally depraved. The Greek verb *korinthiozomoi* means *to practice fornication*, and the expression *korinthiai hetairai* means *Corinthian companion* or *prostitute*. The temple of Aphrodite gave sanction to the practice of religious prostitution. It is no wonder that Romans 1 was penned from Corinth, Greece!

Paul's Arrival in Corinth 18:1-4

His Personal Friendship 18:1-3

"After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. ²And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, ³and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working; for by trade they were tentmakers."

There was a providential aspect to the meeting of Aquila, Priscilla, and Paul. Claudius had issued a decree (this is the meaning of the word *commanded*) in the ninth year of his reign, A.D. 49. The historian Suetonius tells the reason for the edict saying, "As the Jews were indulging in constant riots at the instigation of Chrestus, he banished them from Rome." Aquila and Priscilla were among the banished ones.

In addition to this circumstance, Aquila and Priscilla and Paul were part of an occupational brotherhood. Their common trade was *skanopoios*, which by etymology means *tentmaker* but by usage refers to a leather worker.

The hand of God in the decree of Claudius bringing these three together should be observed. First, Aquila and Priscilla were brought into contact with Paul and thus with the word of God. Second, it gave Aquila and Priscilla an opportunity to instruct a young man named Apollos (Acts 18:24-26). Finally, the home of Aquila and Priscilla became the home of the church (I Corinthians 16:19).

Paul practiced a trade and conducted a ministry. As a result, Paul worked all of the time (I Thessalonians 2:9; 11 Thessalonians 3:7-10) and supported his companions as well as himself (Acts 20:34-35).

His Public Ministry 18:4

"And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks."

There is a fragmentary door inscription, written in Greek, found at Corinth, and dated between 100 B.C. and A.D. 200, that reads, "Synagogue of the Hebrews." Perhaps this is the place spoken of in this verse.

The primary motif of Paul's ministry followed the preaching/persuasion pattern. The results of his ministry, however, were so meager that he would have left Corinth had God not given him a special revelation. See Acts 18:10 where God had to remind him he had "many people in this city."

Paul's Stay in Corinth 18:5-11

The Gifts 18:5

"But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ."

The arrival of Silas and Timothy is the historical event that lies behind the book of I Thessalonians (see I Thessalonians 3:6-8). What happened that made it possible for Paul to devote full time to the ministry of the Word? Philippians 4:15-16 provides the answer—the church at Philippi sent him a monetary gift; and this freed him, at least temporarily, from the need to practice his trade of tent making.

The Crisis 18:6-7

"And when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, 'Your blood be upon your own heads! I am clean. From now on I shall go to the Gentiles.'⁷ And he departed from there and went to the house of a certain man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue."

The ministry in Corinth followed Paul's normal pattern. First, he made an initial proclamation in the synagogue. Second, the majority of Jews rejected the message. Finally, there was a direct outreach to the Gentiles.

The shaking out of Paul's garments symbolized two things. It was a protest of the Jews' opposition and an exemption from further responsibility to them (Acts 13:51).

This verse teaches the concept of discharged responsibility. Paul followed a policy of taking the gospel where it was appreciated. He had argued the gospel before a Jewish audience, and now it is time to move on. Paul assumes no guilt for their negative reaction to the truth. This is expressed in the words *I am clean*.

The Church 18:8

"And Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized."

According to I Corinthians 1:14-16, Paul had set aside his practice of not baptizing in the case of Crispus. Why did he make this exception? Perhaps it was because his conversion created such great excitement that Paul felt it would be appropriate to baptize him personally. The Corinthian church was a beehive of activity, as is expressed in the continuous action verbs *were hearing*, *were believing*, and *were being baptized*. The church grew as it met to hear the word of God in a faith atmosphere.

The Encouragement 18:9-11

"And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, 'Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; ¹⁰for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.' ¹¹And he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them."

Paul is told to *stop being afraid*, showing that he was a genuine human being capable of fear just as all of us are. What, however, was Paul afraid of? He probably feared for his physical well being. He was certainly in danger because of the conversion of Crispus. From the Jewish standpoint, he had defected from Judaism, a thing they would not take lightly. The Jews were constantly reminded of his presence because of his close physical proximity to the synagogue (18:7).

Verses 10 and 11 show how God provided Paul with assurance concerning the continuation of his ministry. There were occasions in Paul's life when special revelation and encouragement was needed. God provided grace when the situation was most grave. There are three specific instances of this truth—first, when Paul feared for his life in Corinth (Acts 18:10-11); second, when Paul feared for his life in Jerusalem (Acts 23:10-11), third, when Paul feared for his life at sea (Acts 27:20-24).

The appearance of the Lord to Paul accomplished several things. It gave Paul personal encouragement; it gave sanction to his position as an apostle, and it gave the church at Corinth special immunity from danger.

Paul's Trial in Corinth 18:12-17***The Charge of the Jews Made 18:12-13***

"But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat, ¹³saying, 'This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.' "

The Lord had promised Paul *protection* from attack but not *freedom* from attack, and the promise had no sooner been made than the attack came.

Who was Gallio? He was far more than a city magistrate; he was the proconsul of Achaia. Any decision he made would apply to the whole province and would be followed by governors of the other provinces. Had he ruled against Paul, his ministry would have been over for the rest of the next decade or so. Gallio was a very amiable man. Seneca (the name of both his father and brother) said of him, "No mortal is so pleasant to any one person as Gallio is to everybody."

The Charge of the Jews Disregarded 18:14-17

"But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, 'If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you; ¹⁵but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters.' ¹⁶And he drove them away from the judgment seat. ¹⁷And they all took hold of Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and began beating him in front of the judgment seat. And Gallio was not concerned about any of these things."

Paul was ready to make his own defense before Gallio as indicated by the statement that he was *about to open his mouth*. Though Paul does not get to speak here, he does defend himself on two later occasions: before Felix in chapter 24 and Agrippa in chapter 26. From these two places, we know what Paul was probably prepared to say on this occasion. First, Paul would have argued that the gospel he preached was consistent with the Old Testament. Second, Jesus was the fulfillment of prophecies and promises made since Abraham.

As the remarks of Gallio demonstrate, the Romans knew little and cared less about Jewish affairs. Though Paul has his defense prepared, Gallio does not even care to hear the case. Verse 17 concludes with an obvious anti-Semitic outburst.

EVANGELIZING EPHESUS 18:18-22

In Acts 18:12-17 the Jews charged that Christianity was not a legal religion under Roman law. They attempted to raise the issue before Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia. He refused to hear the charge, and the matter was dismissed. Because of this, Christianity proceeded without legal interference and with good success for the next nine months.

In the spring of A.D. 52, Paul left Corinth to return to Palestine. Acts 18:18-22 tells of two short visits: to Ephesus (18:18-21) and Jerusalem and Antioch (18:22). Acts 18:23-19:20 centers in Ephesus and presents the ministry of Apollos (18:24-28) and then that of Paul (19:1-20).

Paul's Visit to Ephesus 18:18-21***His Vow Before Leaving 18:18***

"And Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow."

Cutting the hair was the act that terminated the Nazarite vow (Numbers 6:1-21). The Nazarite vow was made to God for a set period of time during which the hair was left uncut. At the end of the vow, the hair was cut and presented in the temple at Jerusalem.

Cenchrea was the eastern seaport of Corinth, so the vow must have been made in Corinth. Perhaps it was made in thanksgiving for God's faithful protection (Acts 18:9-10). Since it was a Jewish practice, why did Paul take the vow? Was it done in order to conciliate the Jews (see Acts 16:3)? Was Paul right in so doing? These are intriguing questions, but we are given no answers.

His Activity Upon Arriving 18:19-21

"And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.²⁰ And when they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent,²¹ but taking leave of them and saying, 'I will return to you again if God wills,' he set sail from Ephesus."

Priscilla and Aquila were left at Ephesus and stayed there for a number of years. Paul had met them in Corinth where they had arrived from Rome because of the edict of Claudius in A.D. 49 expelling Jews from that city. We later find Priscilla and Aquila back in Rome (Romans 16:3).

What do we know of Ephesus? It was the greatest commercial city of Asia Minor, strategically located on the route from Rome to the East. Ephesus was a free Greek city with its own senate and civic assembly. Religiously it was known as the "warden of the temple of Artemis," one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The temple was unearthed in 1863 and found to have a foundation four hundred feet long and two hundred feet wide. Artemis was a meteorite and therefore believed to have been made and sent from heaven. Idols of the goddess Artemis were made in Ephesus, providing a very lucrative business. Paul comes to the city preaching Christ, many come to believe, idol sales slump, and Paul is almost killed by the idol makers.

Why did Paul refuse to stay over in Ephesus? Probably because he wanted to reach Jerusalem in time for one of the Jewish festivals. If it were Passover, he had good reason to hasten on since the navigation season was nearing an end.

Paul's Visit to Palestine 18:22

"And when he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and went down to Antioch."

Up and down relates to a journey to or from Jerusalem. Here Paul *went up* from Caesarea to Jerusalem and then *went down* to Antioch.

Whatever Paul had to do in Jerusalem was quickly completed, and Paul went northward to Antioch. Paul gathers that church and probably reports on the progress of the gospel over the preceding months. These two short verses cover a fifteen hundred mile journey and mark the completion of Paul's second journey.

The Third Missionary Journey *or “Heading for Jerusalem”*

Acts 18:23-20:38

THE OUTLINE

- A. The Ministry of Apollos 18:23-28
- B. Paul’s Ministry in Ephesus 19:1-41
 - 1. The Ephesian Update 19:1-7
 - 2. The Ephesian Instruction 19:8-22
 - 3. The Ephesian Riot 19:21-41
- C. Paul’s Journey to Jerusalem 20:1-38
 - 1. To Macedonia 20:1-6
 - 2. To Troas 20:7-12
 - 3. To Miletus 20:13-38

THE COMMENTARY

THE MINISTRY OF APOLLOS 18:23-28

“And having spent some time there, he departed and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples. ²⁴Now a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. ²⁵This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; ²⁶and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. ²⁷And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he helped greatly those who had believed through grace; ²⁸for he powerful-

ly refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ."

Antioch was the base from which Paul had set out on his journeys. Now, as the third journey commences, he once again departs Antioch for the Galatian territory.

While Paul is gone from Ephesus, Luke introduces us to Apollos in the closing verses of Acts 18. As to training, Apollos was *eloquent*, a word incorporating the ideas of education, culture, and fluency. To the Greek mind, no man was truly educated who could not express himself clearly and forcefully. There was no such thing as a person who knew a subject but was unable to teach it. The following two statements tell how Apollos applied his educated mind. First, he was *mighty in the Scriptures*, which points to his message and its content. The highest use of the mind and the highest education is that which is invested in the word of God. Second, he was *instructed in the way of the Lord*. The word *instructed* is *katacheo* (our English word *catechism*). It means *to teach by repeating in the ears* and thus refers to oral instruction.

The expression *way of the Lord* is used only in relationship to the ministry of John the Baptist as the Lord's forerunner (Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23). John's message was preparatory in nature and, to that extent, was short of a full revelation. This explains the need for the action taken by Aquila and Priscilla in verse 26. It also gives background for chapter 19.

As to Apollos's ministry, he taught with fervency of spirit. The word *fervent* means *to boil*—Apollos taught with great enthusiasm. Enthusiasm in ministry is a requirement for all believers (Romans 12:11). His teaching was meticulously accurate, though he fell short of all he needed to know. The theme of Apollos's message was grace, faith, and the identity of Jesus.

PAUL'S MINISTRY IN EPHESUS 19:1-41

The historical setting of Acts 19 is important. Paul's ministry in Ephesus had been very brief—more of a stopover than anything else. Before Paul returned for the more extended visit, more people had identified with Christianity. Priscilla and Aquila had a good grasp of Christian truth. Apollos was gaining a growing concept of Christianity. Finally, there were those in Ephesus who had a deficient understanding of Christianity (Acts 19:1-5).

The Ephesian Update 19:1-7

"And it came about that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper country came to Ephesus, and found some disciples,² and he said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' And they said to him, 'No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.'³ And he said, 'Into what then were you baptized?' And they said, 'Into John's baptism.'⁴ And Paul said, 'John baptized with

the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.’⁵ And when they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying. ⁷And there were in all about twelve men.”

The doctrinal deficiency described in these verses is the same as that which Priscilla and Aquila corrected in Apollos. He had been acquainted only with the baptism of John, and the twelve men described in these verses had the same problem.

It is important to grasp the significance of John and his ministry. He was a man often misunderstood (John 1:19-25); and yet, he had disciples (Luke 7:18). The influence of John lasted for a long time and spread a long way. At the time of the events in Acts 19, John had been dead for twenty-five years.

John’s message must be understood with the concept of progressive revelation in mind. This means that God’s revelation of truth came part by part and prophet by prophet over many years (Hebrews 1:1). Full revelation of truth came with the closing of the New Testament canon (John 16:12-13).

Paul’s questions show he assumes two things. First, these twelve men were true believers. Second, believing and receiving the Holy Spirit were simultaneous events. Their reply to Paul’s question may be taken in two ways. It may mean they did not know the Holy Spirit even existed. Or it may mean they did not know the Holy Spirit had been given (John 7:39). The problem of taking their ignorance in the first sense is to forget that John the Baptist had several things to say about the Holy Spirit. One who listened to John would have heard of the Holy Spirit.

It is obvious in this passage that John’s baptism was different from what we might call Christian baptism. John’s baptism was pre-Pentecost and thus a baptism of expectation and anticipation. Christian baptism, on the other hand, is a baptism of fulfillment

World War II ended with the surrender of Japan on August 10 and the signing of the act of surrender on August 31, 1945. Small pockets of soldiers were later found who did not know the war was over, and they continued acting as though they were still in battle. This same phenomenon is found in Acts—there were scattered pockets of believers who did not yet know Pentecost had occurred.

The Ephesian Instruction 19:8-22

Its Summary 19:8-12

THE INTENSITY OF PAUL’S MINISTRY 19:8-10

“And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. ⁹But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of

the Way before the multitude, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.¹⁰ And this took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks."

If one compares Acts 16:6 and 19:8, an important lesson concerning God's leading may be learned. The comparison shows that Paul is now preaching where he was previously forbidden to preach. It demonstrates that God's leading pertained not only to the place Paul went but also included the time that he went there.

Three months is the longest Paul ever preached in a synagogue. This eventually resulted in a move to the School of Tyrannus. Public activity usually ceased between 11:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., and this was probably when Paul taught. Believers gave up sleep to listen to the word of God. During these years, the churches of the Lycus Valley were founded (Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea).

Acts 19:10 is a good example of how a local assembly of believers should work. Paul dedicated himself to daily study of the word of God and concentrated on teaching those in the School of Tyrannus. In turn, those who learned went to the outlying areas with the message of the gospel. As a result, all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord.

THE POWER OF PAUL'S MINISTRY 19:11-12

"And God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul,¹² so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out."

The power of Paul's ministry was reflected in healings and exorcisms. Healing by means of pieces of material that had contacted Paul's body recalls the healing of those who touched Jesus' cloak (Mark 5:27-30). Acts 5:15 tells of the healing effect of Peter's shadow.

Its Counterfeit 19:13-16

"But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, 'I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches.'¹⁴ And seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this.¹⁵ And the evil spirit answered and said to them, 'I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?'¹⁶ And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded."

Practitioners of magic abounded in the ancient world and in Ephesus in particular. Shakespeare, in "Comedy of Errors," describes Ephesus saying. "They say this town is full of cuzenage, as, nimble jugglers that deceive the eye, dark-working sorcerers that change the mind, soul-killing witches that deform the body, disguised cheaters, prating mountebanks, and many such-like liberties of sin."

Among the papyri are documents containing magical formulas. Use of certain names was believed to have magical power. Among the extant papyri is the Paris magical papyrus #574 which says, "I adjure thee by Jesus the God of the Hebrews." The valid, God-given powers of the apostles were copied and imitated by all kinds of exorcists, and Acts 19:13-16 is an example.

The use of the name Jesus in attempts to perform the miraculous was not unusual. Its use did not mean the user had a personal relationship to the Lord (Matthew 7:22-23). What is described in these verses makes one lesson clear: The name of Jesus Christ is never to be taken lightly.

Its Effectiveness 19:17-20

"And this became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified. ¹⁸Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices. ¹⁹And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of all; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. ²⁰So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing."

The event that just occurred served to distinguish the miracles of Paul from magic practices. It also prompted general respect for the name of Jesus. The word *disclosing* is a key word because the powers of incantations were in their secrecy. In contrast, the power of Christianity is in the open proclamation of the truth. To disclose magic practice was to renounce its power.

Ephesus was so known for its magic that an expression was coined, *ephesia grammata*, which became proverbial for written charms and amulets. To burn books as they did was to renounce the content of the book. The commercial value of books was great. If the money value of the books is measured as Attic drachmae, then the reference point is a man's daily wages.

With Acts 19:20, Luke brings another section of history to a close. The gospel has now reached Europe through the missionary journeys of Paul.

The Ephesian Riot 19:21-41

The Future Plans of Paul 19:21-22

"Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, 'After I have been there, I must also see Rome.' ²²And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while."

The pronoun *these things* refers to all the events that occurred on all three missionary journeys. A problem here revolves about the noun

spirit. Does this mean *Holy Spirit* or *human spirit*? Two other passages speak of the spirit in connection with Paul's travels (Acts 16:6-7 and 21:3-4). If spirit means Holy Spirit in 21:3-4, this might suggest that Paul was driven by his own passion for the salvation of Israel (Romans 9:1-3) rather than under the leading of the Holy Spirit in this instance.

Paul's desire to go to Rome is probably based on his policy of preaching only in virgin territory (Romans 15:20). The eastern part of the Roman Empire had been evangelized (Romans 15:23), and Paul is now ready to go to Rome with his ultimate aim as Spain (Romans 15:28).

The Present Pressures of Paul 19:23-41

THE SPEECH OF DEMETRIUS 19:23-27

"And about that time there arose no small disturbance concerning the Way. ²⁴For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, was bring no little business to the craftsmen; ²⁵these he gathered together with the workmen of similar trades, and said, 'Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business. ²⁶And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all. ²⁷And not only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship should even be dethroned from her magnificence.' "

Luke begins with an opening summary statement in verses 23-24. The extent of the commotion described here is expressed by use of litotes—strong affirmative statements made by a negative expression. To affirm something of great magnitude we might say, "We are not talking small potatoes." The words *no small disturbance* mean *a great disturbance*.

The disturbance is not presented as a personal attack on Paul but as an affront to the Way. The rebellion was a threat to the entire Christian way of thinking.

Artemis is pictured as a many breasted female. This caricature is derived from those who discerned such a female in a fallen meteorite. She was worshiped for her supposed nutritive elements. The Temple of Artemis was a major depository for the wealth of the ancient world. Money placed there was believed to be under the protective care of deity.

Disturbances found in the book of Acts were frequently caused by the plotting of the Jews. In Ephesus, however, the gospel was resisted because it was viewed as an interference in commercial interests (see also Acts 16:16-19). Pliny once wrote the Emperor Trajan and warned him of the decline of the sale of fodder for the sacrificial animals due to the spread of Christianity (Epistle x.96).

The shrines of Artemis were silver statuettes used as souvenirs, votive offerings, and amulets. Demetrius appeals to the greed of the idol makers and secondarily to their religious devotion. His plan was simple: Turn people from Paul and stir up devotion to Artemis, which would result in bigger business and better profits. One historical writer lists thirty-three places in the world where the Ephesian Artemis was worshiped.

THE RESPONSE OF THE PEOPLE 19:28-34

- Directed Toward Gaius and Aristarchus 19:28-29

"And when they heard this and were filled with rage, they began crying out, saying, 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!'"²⁹ And the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed with one accord into the theater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia".

The words spoken by the crowd were a ceremonial chant. The theater held about twenty-five thousand people and may still be seen today. Gaius was from Derbe, and Aristarchus was from Thessalonica (Acts 20:4). It has been well said that in the last analysis, the most paganism can do to Christianity is shout itself hoarse. The life threatening nature of this riot is seen not only in the plain implications of the narrative but in allusions made to this riot elsewhere. See, for example, I Corinthians 15:32, II Corinthians 1:8-10 and 11:26.

- Directed Toward Paul 19:30-31

"And when Paul wanted to go into the assembly, the disciples would not let him."³¹ And also some of the Asiarchs who were friends of his sent to him and repeatedly urged him not to venture into the theater."

To understand what is about to happen and who is going to do what, we need to know something about the authority structure in Ephesus. First, the supreme authority was always that of Rome, often represented by a proconsul (Acts 18:12). Second, Ephesus was a free city with a democratic government. Citizens met three times a month in a gathering called the *ekklesia* (Acts 19:32). This *ekklesia* had a secretary who is here called a *town clerk*. The Asiarchs were members of wealthy, noble families who were bound together to promote the cult of the emperor, though they had no political authority. The crowd was not only anti-Christian but also anti-Jewish.

- Directed Toward Alexander 19:32-34

"So then, some were shouting one thing and some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and the majority did not know for what cause they had come together."³³ And some of the crowd concluded it was Alexander, since the Jews had put him forward; and having motioned with his hand, Alexander was intending to make a defense to the assembly."³⁴ But when they recognized that he was a Jew, a single outcry arose from them all as they shouted for about two hours, 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!' "

Alexander was put forth as a Jewish attempt to dissociate themselves from Christians. They wanted all to know that the Jewish colony had nothing to do with the uproar. Their attempt may have made matters worse—Alexander was shouted down for two hours.

THE INTERVENTION OF THE TOWN CLERK 19:35-41

• Be Assured of the Strength of Artemis! 19:35-36

“And after quieting the multitude, the town clerk said, ‘Men of Ephesus, what man is there after all who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is guardian of the temple of the great Artemis, and of the image which fell down from heaven?’³⁶ Since then these are undeniable facts, you ought to keep calm and to do nothing rash.’ ”

The town clerk was the executive officer who published the decrees of the assembly—he was the most important official in Ephesus. He was the link between civil authority and imperial Rome. He would therefore be held accountable for the present riot. It was in his own best interest to calm the crowd.

He quiets the crowd by telling them they need not fear for the honor of Artemis. Everyone knew of her majesty, and everyone knew her image was made in heaven. The town clerk reveals the mentality of paganism. Anything that fell from heaven, such as the meteorite they called Artemis, must be sent from heaven.

• Be Assured of the Innocence of Gaius and Aristarchus! 19:37

“ ‘For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess.’ ”

• Be Assured of the Courts! 19:38-39

“ ‘So then, if Demetrius and the craftsmen who are with him have a complaint against any man, the courts are in session and proconsuls are available; let them bring charges against one another.’³⁹ But if you want anything beyond this, it shall be settled in the lawful assembly.’ ”

The provincial government was functioning, and aggrieved parties should avail themselves of legal recourse. Roman authorities would not tolerate disorderly proceedings, and the city could be charged with responsibility for the riot.

• Be Assured of the Danger of Riot! 19:40-41

“ ‘For indeed we are in danger of being accused of a riot in connection with today’s affair, since there is no real cause for it; and in this connection we shall be unable to account for this disorderly gathering.’⁴¹ And after saying this he dismissed the assembly.”

The speech of the town clerk forms an apologetic for Christianity. Even a pagan is able to argue for the innocence of Christians concerning revolt against the Roman Empire.

PAUL’S JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM 20:1-38

Acts 20-23 concerns itself with one theme: the journey of Paul to Jerusalem. The narrative is highly condensed. The journey through

Macedonia took many months but is covered in three verses. During this time, Paul was extremely busy. In this period, the Corinthian epistles and Romans were written; and Illyricum was also evangelized at this time. Of the many towns Paul visited, Luke wraps them up in one word saying he came to "Greece."

With Acts 20:6, however, the style changes; and Luke lists every city from Philippi to Jerusalem (20:13-15, 21:1-3). Why the details about the stopping places? Perhaps it is because Paul is leaving these churches, never expecting to see them again. The farewell address to the church at Ephesus in Acts 20:17-25 is an example of what was said to all of those churches. Thus, the heart of Acts 20 is the address to Ephesus, and the listing of the many stopping places is where that address or something very similar was given.

To Macedonia 20:1-6

The Brief Summary 20:1-2

"And after the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples and when he had exhorted them and taken his leave of them, he departed to go to Macedonia. ²And when he had gone through those districts and had given them much exhortation, he came to Greece."

This is the briefest account of an extended ministry found in the book of Acts. According to II Corinthians 7:5-16, Macedonia, probably at Philippi, was where Paul met Titus who brought him good news about the church at Corinth.

Much of the exhortation must have centered about the collection of money for the impoverished Jerusalem church. Paul instructed the churches of Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia concerning this as seen in Romans 15:25-32, I Corinthians 16:1-4, and II Corinthians 8 and 9.

The Winter in Greece 20:3-6

"And there he spent three months, and when a plot was formed against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he determined to return through Macedonia. ⁴And he was accompanied by Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus; and by Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. ⁵But these had gone ahead and were waiting for us at Troas. ⁶And we sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and came to them at Troas within five days; and there we stayed seven days."

Most of the time was spent in Corinth where Paul wrote the book of Romans, paving the way for his visit to the imperial capital en route to Spain.

Paul's traveling companions represent groups of churches. Sopater, Aristarchus, and Secundus represent the churches of Macedonia;

Gaius and Timothy, those of Galatia; and Tychicus and Trophimus represent the churches of Asia.

To Troas 20:7-12

The Meeting 20:7-9

“And on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to depart the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight. ⁸And there were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered together. ⁹And there was a certain young man named Eutychus sitting on the window sill, sinking into a deep sleep; and as Paul kept on talking, he was overcome by sleep and fell down from the third floor, and was picked up dead.”

This is the first clear mention of the meeting of the church on the first day of the week, though it may be implied by I Corinthians 16:2. Meeting on Sunday was a custom but not a command. It was probably rooted in the occurrence of the resurrection of Jesus on this day. A set time facilitated orderly procedure in the church (I Corinthians 16:1-4).

The meeting was in the evening and extended until early morning. This shows the kind of people who composed the church. Occupationally, they were slaves. Many of them had probably worked since dawn and had free time in the evening. Spiritually, they held the highest priorities; Eutychus is a good example. He listened to the word of God until he could no longer hold his eyes open. Eutychus listened until he dropped—literally!

Things other than exhaustion may have caused Eutychus to fall asleep. Mention is made of *many lamps* in verse 8. Perhaps their burning used up much of the oxygen in the room, or maybe their flickering had a hypnotic effect. At any rate, Eutychus falls asleep and down three stories and dies.

The Miracle 20:10-12

“But Paul went down and fell upon him and after embracing him, he said, ‘Do not be troubled, for his life is in him.’ ¹¹And when he had gone back up, and had broken the bread and eaten, he talked with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. ¹²And they took away the boy alive, and were greatly comforted.”

Paul’s action is reminiscent of Elijah and Elisha (I Kings 17:21; II Kings 4:34-35). Following this, they returned to the third floor for a meal. Paul did not apologize for talking a long time nor did anyone object to the length of the meeting. The long evening had been an opportunity for learning at the feet of Paul, for recalling the Lord’s death, for having fellowship with one another, and for witnessing a dramatic sign of the power of God in the raising of Eutychus. No wonder they were *greatly comforted*.

To Miletus 20:13-38***The Route 20:13-15***

"But we, going ahead to the ship, set sail for Assos, intending from there to take Paul on board; for thus he had arranged it, intending himself to go by land. ¹⁴And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene. ¹⁵And sailing from there, we arrived the following day opposite Chios; and the next day we crossed over to Samos; and the day following we came to Miletus."

The stopping places mentioned indicate that the ship was a coasting vessel since it put in at main ports along the Asian coast. Miletus was located at the mouth of the Meander River, which was about thirty miles south of Ephesus.

The Explanation 20:16

"For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus in order that he might not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost."

Paul missed Passover but wanted to arrive in Jerusalem for Pentecost, which was fifty days later. Jerusalem is his goal, and nothing will deter his prompt arrival.

The Speech 20:17-35

Paul's farewell to the elders of Ephesus reads more like his epistles than anything else in the book of Acts. Like the epistles, it contains the elements of encouragement, warning, and exhortation.

The speech may be outlined in a past, present, future framework. Paul reviews his past ministry in Ephesus (20:18-21); Paul states his present plan to go to Jerusalem (20:22-24); and Paul predicts the future events that will befall him and the Ephesian believers (20:25-31). Finally, Paul concludes with commendations and reminders (20:32-35). Each section of his speech is marked off by key words that introduce his words.

PAUL'S REVIEW OF HIS PAST MINISTRY 20:17-21

Introductory Words: "You yourselves know..."

• It Was Carried Out for God's Glory 20:17-19

"And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. ¹⁸And when they had come to him, he said to them, 'You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, ¹⁹serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews...' "

Paul begins with the typical designation of his ministry—servanthood. Paul designates himself as a "bond-servant" in Romans as well as in Philippians and Titus. The three marks of his servanthood follow. First, humility is the submission of the mind to the word of God. Second, the tears show that Paul was not impersonal

in his service—he was emotionally involved. Finally, the trials refer to the never ceasing plots of the Jews against Paul. They did not merely want to avoid Paul; they wanted Paul dead (Acts 20:3).

II Corinthians 11:23-29 lists items of the sufferings that do not appear in Acts but were a real aspect of Paul's ministry. Paul suffered more than the book of Acts reveals. Five imprisonments are mentioned in Acts: At Philippi (chapter 16), at Jerusalem (chapter 22), at Caesarea (chapters 23-24), and twice in Rome. As II Corinthians was being written, only the first three had taken place.

Why does Paul mention these things to the Ephesian elders? Because it is evidence of devoted service to them. Paul did not allow personal attack to deter his ministry in Ephesus. He served irrespective of the personal pressure that was placed upon him.

• It Was Carried Out for Your Good 20:20-21

"...how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, ²¹solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."

The verb *I did not shrink* is a single word in middle voice, meaning *to shrink back in fear*. Paul calls attention to this twice in his address (20:20, 27). The word *profitable* means *to confer a benefit*. It is not a reference to Paul's profit but to the church's profit.

Paul's teaching was dogmatic in nature and demanded a response. The word *testifying* has an intensive pronoun attached to it. Paul affirmed truth with great emphasis—there was nothing "iffy" about Pauline preaching. This kind of preaching insisted on a change of mind regarding old and erroneous views and a positive embracing of new found truth.

PAUL'S STATEMENT OF HIS PRESENT PLAN TO GO TO JERUSALEM 20:22-24

Introductory Words: "And now, behold..."

"And now, behold, bound in spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. ²⁴But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God."

The motive for Paul's journey is found in the words *bound in spirit*. Was this compulsion from his human spirit or the Holy Spirit? The same question must be asked concerning the similar statement in Acts 19:21. If reference is to the human spirit, then his plans may not necessarily be under infallible divine direction. If reference is to the Holy Spirit, then his itinerary reflects the will of God completely. Certainly it is possible that the Holy Spirit led through Paul's human spirit. In this case, the emphasis would lie on the agreement of Paul's spirit with the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

These options need to remain open because there seems to be some evidence for saying that Paul's journey to Jerusalem was a mistake. Paul's writings are infallible; Paul's actions are not. We will discuss the wisdom of the Jerusalem journey later.

One of the themes of Paul's teaching is his readiness to sacrifice his life in the interest of the gospel (II Corinthians 4:7-11, 6:9; Philippians 1:20, 2:17, 3:8; Romans 9:1-3). Self-preservation was not a motive that Paul held in high regard. Staying alive was not Paul's concern; finishing the race was (Acts 20:24).

Paul was repeatedly warned of the consequences of going to Jerusalem. The first warning was given by believers in Tyre (Acts 21:4-7). The second was by Agabus at Caesarea in Acts 21:8-11; and the third by his traveling companions (Acts 21:12).

PAUL'S PREDICTION OF FUTURE EVENTS 20:25-35

Introductory Words: "And now, behold..."

- With Regard to Himself 20:25-27

" 'And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will see my face no more. ²⁶Therefore I testify to you this day, that I am innocent of the blood of all men. ²⁷For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.' "

The church in Ephesus was made up of those who had come from pure paganism to Christianity. The founder is now leaving, and they would see his face no more. Verse 26 shows they had been blessed with a superb teacher. If they didn't succeed in the Christian life, no one could point to Paul. If they fail, it would be lack of resolve, not lack of truth. Verse 27 shows they had been blessed with a thorough teacher, for they had been taught the *whole purpose (will) of God*.

- With Regard to the Church 20:28-35

PAUL'S WARNING 20:28-31

" 'Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.' "

It is important to note that the leaders are exhorted to guard themselves first and then the flock. This is based on the premise that Satan attacks the shepherd first and then has free access to the sheep. The command to be on guard presupposes danger. The leadership must not wear rose tinted glasses. There is no "if," "maybe," or "perhaps" about the flock being attacked. It is some-

thing that is certain to happen. The only safety lies in preparation and alertness.

The attack the Ephesian church will face is both external and internal. Wolves *will come in among you* (external attack) and men *from among your own selves* (internal attack) will enter.

When Paul reminds them of his three year stay, he is saying, "Remember your spiritual heritage." There is a loyalty due to faithful teaching, and Paul does not hesitate to remind believers of this fact.

PAUL'S COMMENDATION 20:32-35

" 'And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. ³⁴You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. ³⁵In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' " ' "

Three dynamics of the Christian life are found here. The first centers about a person—I *commend you to God*. No matter how we might try to help another believer, the bottom line is their personal relationship to the Lord. It is not "you and me" but "you and God" that makes the difference.

The second dynamic centers about the Scriptures—the *word*. Paul and the other apostles have departed this earth, but they have left a legacy in the New Testament canon of Scripture. Third, the word *grace* shows the pivotal doctrine that the New Testament proclaims. It is so central that Peter's exhortation is to "grow in grace" (II Peter 3:18).

These dynamics work effectively in the Christian life because they possess inherent power (*able* is a present tense, continuous action participle). The words *build you up* point to the *stabilizing* effect of God's word, and the words *give you an inheritance* point to their *rewarding* power.

In Acts 20:34-35, Paul reminds the elders that the people of God must be cared for without regard to personal reward. The quotation attributed to Jesus is not found in the gospels. However, the spirit of the words is found in places such as Luke 6:38, 11:9ff, and John 13:34. Blessing lies in giving, not in getting.

The Departure 20:36-38

"And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. ³⁷And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, ³⁸grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they should see his face no more. And they were accompanying him to the ship."

The words spoken by Paul in Acts 20:25, *you will see my face no more*, brought tears to their eyes and grief to their souls; and they freely expressed such emotion. But Paul was headed for Jerusalem, and the ship from Miletus was ready to depart; Paul bids the church his final farewell.

Paul in Jerusalem

or "The Insistent Journey"

Acts 21:1-36

THE OUTLINE

- A. The En Route Portion 21:1-16
 - 1. The Warning of the Believers in Tyre 21:1-6
 - 2. The Warning of the Prophet Agabus 21:7-11
 - 3. The Warning of Believer's at Caesarea 21:12-14
- B. The Arrival Portion 21:15-36
 - 1. The Meeting 21:15-26
 - 2. The Mob 21:27-36

THE COMMENTARY

THE EN ROUTE PORTION 21:1-16

Just before the riot at Ephesus recorded in Acts 19, Paul announced his travel plans that are carried out throughout the rest of the book of Acts. Luke tells us, "Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, 'After I have been there, I must also see Rome.' "

Every possible effort was made to change Paul's mind about the trip to Jerusalem, but he is undeterred. We have subtitled these verses "The Insistent Journey."

The Warning of the Believers in Tyre 21:1-6

Sailing to Tyre 21:1-3

"And when it came about that we had parted from them and had set sail, we ran a straight course to Cos and the next day to Rhodes and from there

to Patara; ²and having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. ³And when we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left, we kept sailing to Syria and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload its cargo.”

The departure from Ephesus had been a highly emotional experience. The word translated *grieving* in Acts 20:38 is a word used for the suffering of hell in Luke 16:24 where it is translated *agony*. The word *parted* in Acts 21:1 means *to tear away* and is used for painful, heartrending separations.

Acts 21:1 opens the third “we” section of Acts. This means that Luke was one of Paul’s companions and is giving us a first-hand report of what he saw. The words found here probably came from Luke’s travel journal.

Warning in Tyre 21:4

“And after looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem.”

This is the first of three warnings given to Paul attempting to deter him from the journey to Jerusalem. Paul had an enormous passion for the salvation of his fellow Israelites. Romans 9:1-3 tells of his willingness to perish eternally for their salvation. Three men in Scripture shared this willingness: Moses, Paul, and Jesus. We must also recall that his desire to serve the Lord was greater than his desire to preserve his own life (Acts 20:22-24). Was Paul right in insisting on going to Jerusalem? A definitive answer is not possible; but from the evidence in front of us, it seems that we should be free to question the wisdom of his decision.

Verse 4 is the first indication that the journey was unwise. Should we take the word *spirit* to be the human spirit, or does it refer to the Holy Spirit? NASB has taken it to refer to the Holy Spirit and has thus capitalized the noun. The advice was given by many; but the word *spirit* is singular, which would cause us to lean toward the Holy Spirit.

When Paul wrote, he did so under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This means his writings are inerrant truth. This does not mean, however, that every move Paul made was infallibly correct. It seems here that his zeal for the salvation of the Jew may have made him deaf to the direction of the Holy Spirit not to go to Jerusalem. He doubtless made the journey believing it was the will of God. It is hard to think of Paul as resisting the leading of the Spirit in a direct way. Paul’s determination was not sinful but seems to have been unwise.

The Departure from Tyre 21:5-6

“And when it came about that our days there were ended, we departed and started on our journey, while they all, with wives and children, escorted us until we were out of the city. And after kneeling down on the beach and

praying, we said farewell to one another. ⁶Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home again."

The believers in Tyre had not been old friends as the believers in Ephesus had. However, by the end of the week, they had become fast friends; and they, along with their families, escorted Paul to the ship and he departed.

The Warning of the Prophet Agabus 21:7-11

The House of Philip 21:7-9

"And when we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais; and after greeting the brethren, we stayed with them for a day. ⁸And on the next day we departed and came to Caesarea; and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him. ⁹Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses."

The southernmost port of Phoenicia was Ptolemais, which had probably been evangelized at the same time as Tyre.

Philip was one of the early deacons appointed by the church in Acts 6 (not the apostle Philip). Following this, he carried on an evangelistic ministry in Samaria and the coastal area. The last time we met him was twenty years ago in Caesarea (Acts 8:40), where he still remains. His daughters were prophetesses, but we are not given any of their prophecies.

The Arrival of Agabus 21:10-11

"And as we were staying there for some days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, 'This is what the Holy Spirit says: "In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." ' "

Agabus was the Jerusalemite prophet who had foretold of a great famine (Acts 11:28), and the church had responded by sending Paul and Barnabas with provisions for the church. Agabus does not tell Paul not to go to Jerusalem; he merely points out what is going to happen to him when he does go. In a symbolical way, he foretold Paul's upcoming binding in Jerusalem. He also foretold who his opponents would be and where he would end up (Acts 23:23-24). Agabus makes no attempt to interpret the meaning of his prophecy.

The Warning of Believer's at Caesarea 21:12-14

"And when we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³Then Paul answered, 'What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.' ¹⁴And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, 'The will of the Lord be done!' "

The attempts to dissuade Paul in Acts 21 combine to show how resolute Paul was concerning the Jerusalem journey. The use of the pronoun *we* shows that Luke himself was one of those who tried to convince Paul not to make the journey.

Paul was not to be deterred. His words, you are *breaking my heart*, are equivalent to “you are trying to soften my will.” Paul knows of the dangers that await him but does not count them of sufficient significance to change his travel plans.

THE ARRIVAL PORTION 21:15-36

The Meeting 21:15-26

The Report 21:15-19

“And after these days we got ready and started on our way up to Jerusalem. ¹⁶And some of the disciples from Caesarea also came with us, taking us to Mnason of Cyprus, a disciple of long standing with whom we were to lodge. ¹⁷And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. ¹⁸And now the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹And after he had greeted them, he began to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.”

Peter and John were not resident in Jerusalem, having ministries elsewhere. James remained in Jerusalem and was the chief leader of the church there. Paul gives the Jerusalem leaders an organized, event by event account of his ministry among the Gentiles. As usual, the emphasis is on the activity of God, with Paul as the human instrument.

The Response 21:20-22

“And when they heard it they began glorifying God; and they said to him, ‘You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law; ²¹and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. ²²What, then, is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come.’ ”

Upon hearing of the report of gentile salvation, they immediately glorified God for such good news. However, they say, there is a problem; there is widespread rumor about Paul’s preaching. The Jewish Christians of Jerusalem have heard that Paul did not impose the Law on gentile converts (as was agreed upon by the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15). But more than this, they have heard that Paul taught Jewish believers to discontinue their ancestral practices, going so far as to discourage the practice of circumcision.

Nowhere is there evidence that Paul did any such thing. What they have heard is rumor and untrue rumor at that. Even if Paul had

taught what they rumored, so what? Nonetheless, the leaders in Jerusalem believe it will take more than verbal assurance to convince the Jewish believers that this rumor is not true.

The Proposal 21:23-25

“Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; ²⁴take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses in order that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law. ²⁵But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication.’ ”

The leaders believed that if the Jews saw Paul publicly participating in a Jewish practice, it would effectively give lie to the rumor. There were four who had taken a Nazarite vow, which was temporary in nature. They had apparently been defiled in some way and, according to the Law, had to wait seven days and undergo a rite of purification in the Temple.

If Paul pays the expense of such a purification rite, the Jews will then be convinced, so they think, that Paul *walk(s) orderly*, a military term for keeping in step. The leadership assumes that such a rumor can be quieted by appeasement.

They assure Paul in verse 25 that no violation of the agreement of the Jerusalem conference is intended, and Gentiles are to be left alone with regard to the Law but enjoined to renounce heathen practices.

The Compliance 21:26

“Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple, giving notice of the completion of the days of purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them.”

Paul decided to go along with the proposal of the Jerusalem leadership. Was Paul wise in so doing? The following events make one thing abundantly clear; the whole plan backfired. The Jewish legalists were not convinced, and the move nearly cost Paul his life.

The response suggested by the Jerusalem elder rests on several false assumptions about legalism. First, it assumes something good can come out of compromise. Second, it assumes a legalist is capable of being reasonable (21:24).

The Mob 21:27-36

The Jewish Uprising 21:27-30

THE WORDS OF THE JEWS 21:27-28

“And when the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, upon seeing him in the temple, began to stir up all the multitude and laid hands

on him,²⁸ crying out, 'Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people, and the Law, and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.' "

Jewish law concerning entry into the temple was very strict. As Paul completed his ritual obligations, he was in the Court of the Men. This was in the inner precincts of the temple where Jewish men who were not priests could come. It was a capital offense for a Gentile to enter this area. The Roman government so respected this Jewish law that they ratified the death penalty, even when the offender was a Roman citizen.

Titus, the Roman commander-in-chief said, "Have not you, vile wretches that you are, by our permission, put up this partition-wall before your sanctuary? Have you not been allowed to put up the pillars thereto belonging at due distances, and on it to engrave in Greek, and in your own letters, this prohibition, that no foreigner should go beyond that wall? Have not we given you leave to kill such as go beyond it, though he were a Roman?" (*The Wars of the Jews*, book 6, chapter 2, section 1).

To prevent a Gentile from accidentally wandering into the Jewish precincts were inscriptions written in Greek and Latin warning of the death penalty attached for unlawful entry. This notice was attached to a barrier at the foot of the steps leading to the Court of Men. Two of these notices have been found, one in 1871 and another in 1935. Their text says, "No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the temple and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death." This may be the barrier Paul had in mind in Ephesians 2:14.

THE EXPLANATION OF LUKE 21:29-30

"For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. ³⁰ And all the city was aroused, and the people rushed together; and taking hold of Paul, they dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut."

The Asian Jews, who would stop at nothing, charge that Paul had brought Trophimus, a Greek from Ephesus, into the forbidden area.

The crime that Paul had supposedly committed was a capital offense that easily ignited the fanatical zeal of many of the pilgrims to Jerusalem. Paul was dragged into the Court of the Gentiles. The temple guard immediately shut the gates in order to prevent the inner courts from being defiled by possible bloodshed.

The Roman Rescue 21:31-36

BY THE ROMAN SOLDIERS 21:31-32

"And while they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. ³² And at

once he took along some soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them; and when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul."

Northwest of the temple area stood the Fortress of Antonia. In it was a Roman cohort of soldiers. It was connected to the outer court of the temple by two flights of steps. Upon word of the riot taking place in the temple, soldiers were dispatched. These were not the temple police, and the commander was not Jewish. He represented the interests of Rome, and keeping the peace was his major responsibility. Since the word *centurions* is plural, we may safely assume a minimum of two hundred soldiers entered the temple area.

BY THE ROMAN COMMANDER 21:33-36

"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. ³⁴But among the crowd some were shouting one thing and some another, and when he could not find out the facts on account of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. ³⁵And when he got to the stairs, it so happened that he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob; ³⁶for the multitude of the people kept following behind, crying out, 'Away with him!'"

Paul was arrested by the Roman soldiers and handcuffed to two of them (21:33). This was a protective measure, for had they not done this, Paul would have been dead in a matter of minutes. The crowd was so loud and boisterous that the soldiers could not even question Paul, so he was escorted to the fortress.

The moment one's eye meets the verb *airo*, which means *take away*, one is carried back twenty years when another Jewish crowd screamed this very word concerning Jesus (Luke 23:18).

Paul in the Hands of the Jews

or "Bound in Jerusalem"

Acts 21:37-23:35

THE OUTLINE

- A. Paul's Defense Before the Nation 21:37-22:30
 - 1. Paul's Request 21:37-40
 - 2. Paul's Defense 22:1-21
 - 3. Paul's Rejection 22:22-23
 - 4. Paul's Rescue 22:24-30
- B. Paul's Defense Before the Sanhedrin 23:1-11
 - 1. The Address 23:1
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- C. The Plot to Kill Paul 23:12-35
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 - 2. Its Discovery 23:16-22
 - 3. Its Defeat 23:23-35

THE COMMENTARY

PAUL'S DEFENSE BEFORE THE NATION 21:37-22:30

Paul's Request 21:37-40

His Mistaken Identity 21:37-38

"And as Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the commander, 'May I say something to you?' And he said, 'Do you know Greek? ³⁸Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?'"

The commander's attention is caught by Paul's request spoken in fluent Greek. The word *then* is an inferential particle pointing to a conclusion that follows. Here the commander concludes that Paul is not who they all thought he was.

Three years before this incident, an Egyptian claiming to be a prophet appeared in Jerusalem. He gained some followers and led them to the Mount of Olives where they were to wait. At the words of the prophet, the walls would fall flat; they would then enter and overthrow the Fortress of Antonia. The procurator Felix sent troops against them and took some prisoners and killed others. The Egyptian wisely disappeared. The Roman soldiers thought Paul was this prophet reappearing. When the commander hears Paul speak in Greek, he knows this identity is incorrect.

His True Identity 21:39-40

"But Paul said, 'I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city; and I beg you, allow me to speak to the people.'⁴⁰ And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the stairs, motioned to the people with his hand; and when there was a great hush, he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect, saying..."

With pride, Paul speaks of Tarsus, the city of his birth and upbringing. The words *I am a Jew* are literally *I* (emphatic pronoun) *a man, I am a Jew*, a strong statement. Paul's request to speak is granted; and he begins to address the people in Aramaic (*Hebrew dialect*), the lingua franca of Palestine. Paul begins by establishing national and linguistic identity with his audience.

Paul's Defense 22:1-21

His Heritage 22:1-5

INTRODUCTION 22:1-2

" 'Brethren and fathers, hear my defense which I now offer to you.'² And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew dialect, they became even more quiet; and he said..."

Paul's opening words tell the nature of his speech. It is called a *defense* (Greek *apologia*, English *apology*). An apology is a speech made in defense. Apologetics is the field of study that concerns itself with the defense of Christian truth, especially the integrity of Scripture. I Peter 3:15 enjoins every believer to be an apologist for the hope that we have as Christians saying, "but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense (apology) to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you... ."

Paul addresses the crowd with the formal Jewish address, *Men, brothers* (*men* is omitted in our English translation) and then adds *fathers*. Because this is a formal address, some have suggested that members of the Sanhedrin must be present.

Luke comments that when the crowd heard him speak in their native tongue, the atmosphere became hushed.

TARSUS TO DAMASCUS 22:3-5

"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, just as you all are today. ⁴And I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, ⁵as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished."

Paul had been attacked as being anti-Jewish (Acts 21:28). His statements here show how false that charge is. Paul was a Jew by birth; he was not a proselyte. A proselyte was one who was not a Jew by birth but wished to establish formal relationship to Israel. A proselyte was required to undergo circumcision, perform a self-baptism in the presence of witnesses, and offer a sacrifice. Paul had done none of this—he was a born Jew.

The words *brought up* denote training, correction, and instruction as in Acts 7:22 (*educated*) and Titus 2:11-12 (*instructing*). Paul received more than food and clothing in his Jewish home. As to his education, it was received *under Gamaliel*, which is literally *at the feet of Gamaliel*. This was a metaphor that suggested intimacy and submission to authority. Gamaliel was the most respected rabbi of that day.

The word *strictly* points to Paul's orthodoxy. The Sadducees were known for their latitude, the Pharisees for their strictness; Paul was a Pharisee. In both Philippians and II Corinthians, Paul expresses his orthodoxy as being a *Hebrew of the Hebrews*.

Paul offers the words of the high priest, Jonathan or Theophilus, as testimony to his anti-Christian zeal. Considering this kind of background, how can one account for Paul's earnest preaching of Christ in Jerusalem? Verses 6-16 describe the divine intervention that occurred on Paul's journey to Damascus.

His Conversion 22:6-16

THE LIGHT 22:6

" 'And it came about that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me.' "

The unexpected flashing light shows that this was not a subjective experience churned up within Paul's own heart. It was dramatic, outward, and from above.

THE LORD 22:7-16

• The Dialogue 22:7-11

" '...and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" ⁸And I answered, "Who art Thou, Lord?" And He said to me, "I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting." ⁹And those who were with me beheld the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me. ¹⁰And I said, "What shall I do, Lord?" And the Lord said to me, "Arise and go on into Damascus; and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do." ' "

The Lord's question to Saul reveals the personal relationship He sustains to believers. In persecuting *them*, Paul persecuted *Him*. This may be the first hint about Paul's teaching of the believer's position *in Christ*. It is comforting to know that what touches the believer also touches the Lord.

The change in Paul is dramatic: Paul now awaits the commands of the One he once persecuted. Paul gives three accounts of his Damascus road experience. The first is found in Acts 9 and is descriptive of what happened to him; the second and third, found in Acts 22 and 26, are defensive. All three mention his commission to the Gentiles.

• The Meeting with Ananias 22:12-16

" 'And a certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, ¹³came to me, and standing near said to me, "Brother Saul, receive your sight!" And at that very time I looked up at him. ¹⁴And he said, "The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear an utterance from His mouth. ¹⁵For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." ' "

Ananias reminds Paul that he has both heard and seen Jesus *the Righteous One*. That Paul actually saw Jesus is emphasized in Paul's epistles more than in the book of Acts. I Corinthians 9:1 and 15:8 show the significance of seeing Jesus.

It is interesting to note that the washing away of Paul's sins follows the Damascus road experience by a number of days. Does this mean

Paul was not saved on the Damascus road, but rather a few days later upon his baptism? Is the washing away of sins the same as justification by faith? Is the washing away of sins *equal* to saved. It is always precarious to assume equal signs between expressions unless we have full warrant for doing so. Since the believer experiences forgiveness and cleansing from sin on a daily basis (I John 1:9), it is best to refer to the washing as post-salvation.

The matrix of Paul's commission is Jewish. Ananias was a devout Jew; and his terminology is Jewish, as in *the God of our fathers* and the Messianic title *the Righteous One*. This fits the context beautifully. Paul is defending himself before the Jewish people, and it is important to prove that his commission from Jesus came through a Jewish man and was expressed in Jewish terms.

His Commission 22:17-21

THE LORD COMMANDS 22:17-18

" 'And it came about when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance,¹⁸ and I saw Him saying to me, "Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me." ' "

Paul had been called on the Damascus road. About three years later, he came to the temple in Jerusalem where the Lord appeared to him again. This time the call was reaffirmed and expanded. Paul tells of this experience in these verses.

PAUL REMONSTRATES 22:19-20

" 'And I said, "Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in Thee.²⁰ And when the blood of Thy witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the cloaks of those who were slaying him." ' "

Paul's reasoning is this: His anti-Christian past in Jerusalem was fresh in people's minds, and many would remember his role in Stephen's death. His radical change of mind, then, must rest on solid grounds; and they would listen to his message. This line of thought was wrong, for the people were more unwilling to hear because of his past record.

THE LORD RESPONDS 22:21

" 'And He said to me, "Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles." ' "

The Lord once again orders him to leave Jerusalem. The mention of his commission to the Gentiles was "the last straw" for the listening crowd of Jews. Paul was saying that Gentiles could come to God apart from the nation of Israel and its institutions. This was tantamount to placing Jew and Gentile on an equal footing before God. For the Jew, this was the height of apostasy.

Paul's Rejection 22:22-23

"And 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!' ²³And as they were crying out and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust into the air..."

To this point, Paul had the attention of the crowd since everything he said was in a Jewish context. Even mention of Jesus as Messiah could be tolerated by the Jewish crowd. After all, they were more interested in acceptable practice than correct belief. But to go away from Jerusalem and Judaism and reach out to Gentiles was more than they could bear to hear. Paul's words were followed by a riot of gesticulation and rage. It was well that the only thing available to throw was dust; had there been stones, Paul would have been dead.

Paul's Rescue 22:24-29***The Scourge 22:24***

"...the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, stating that he should be examined by scourging so that he might find out the reason why they were shouting against him that way."

The scourge was an instrument of punishment and inquisition. A scourging was so severe that it usually had one of two effects. First, it could leave one crippled for life—one never got over a scourging. Second, sometimes a scourging killed. Roman citizens, however, were exempt from examination by torture.

For a Roman citizen to be tried, the following procedure had to be followed. First, there had to be a formulation of charges and penalties. Second, a formal accusation had to be made. Third, there was a hearing before a Roman magistrate and his advisory cabinet. Unaware that Paul was a Roman citizen and desiring to know why the Jews were so outraged with him, the commander orders an inquisition by scourging.

The Question 22:25

"And when they stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, 'Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?' "

In preparation for scourging, the victim was stretched out on a stone floor or on a pillar or post. Sometimes they were suspended from the ceiling by a hook. The scourge itself consisted of leather thongs studded with metal and attached to a wooden handle. According to II Corinthians 11:24-25, Paul had received thirty-nine lashes at the hands of the Jews on five occasions and been beaten by Roman authorities three times.

Paul's question to the soldiers brings the whole procedure to a halt. Not only was a Roman citizen exempt from a scourging of inquisition, but those who denied that right were answerable for imposing it illegally.

The Claim 22:26-28

"And when the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and told him, saying, 'What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman.'²⁷ And the commander came and said to him, 'Tell me, are you a Roman?' And he said, 'Yes.'²⁸ And the commander answered, 'I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money.' And Paul said, 'But I was actually born a citizen.'"

The centurion had to be appalled when he saw Paul. Having been set upon by the crowd and dragged from the temple, he hardly looked like a Roman citizen. There was no identifying mark of a Roman citizen unless he wore the toga; official papers were not immediately available. However, a verbal claim to citizenship was acceptable; and falsifying it carried severe penalty.

The Release 22:29

"Therefore, those who were about to examine him immediately let go of him; and the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains."

Paul's Roman citizenship threw a different light on the whole situation. Examination by torture was now out of the question. The commander was probably filled with fear when he realized what he had almost done.

The Review 22:30

"But on the next day, wishing to know for certain why he had been accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Council to assemble, and brought Paul down and set him before them."

As a Roman citizen, Paul had the right to know the nature of the charges against him and the penalties involved before formal accusations could be made. It was the Roman commander's responsibility to determine what these accusations were. So far, he had been unsuccessful in finding out why the Jewish people were so incensed with Paul.

He concludes that it must be some religious matter and orders the Jewish high court to convene. As a Roman military commander, he had no right to participate in the deliberations of the Sanhedrin (Council). But as a Roman official charged with keeping the peace, he could order the court to hear Paul and determine the cause of the riot. The Sanhedrin of the Jews is convened as Acts 23 opens.

PAUL'S DEFENSE BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN 23:1-11

The Address 23:1

"And Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, 'Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.' "

Because of the volatile nature of the events that take place, Paul's defense is difficult to outline. It is best to look at the defense part by part (or better "blow by blow"?).

Paul begins with the common formal address used among the Jews when they assembled. The formula is obscured by our translation for Paul says *andres adelphoi*, literally, *Men, brothers*.

Paul's claim to have lived with good conscience is not unusual as demonstrated by Acts 20:18-21, 26-27; 24:16; Romans 15:19; Philippians 3:6; and II Timothy 4:7. This does not mean that everything Paul did was right, but it does mean that everything he did was done sincerely. He believed he was right when he did it. This included persecution of the church (Acts 26:9). Paul indeed believed persecution of the church was his sacred duty.

These verses record the fifth time the Jewish high court rules on Christianity: First, with Jesus in Matthew 26:57-68; second, with Peter and John in Acts 4:8-22; third, with the twelve as found in Acts 5:27-42; fourth, in connection with Stephen in Acts 7; and now with Paul.

The Rage 23:2

"And the high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth."

Ananias was high priest from A.D. 48-58 and was known for his avarice and use of violence. Josephus says he confiscated tithes given to the ordinary priests. The Talmud has a parody on Psalm 24:7 which reads, "Lift up your heads, O you gates, and let Yohanan (Ananias) enter and fill his stomach with the divine sacrifices." When war against Rome broke out in A.D. 66, he was so pro-Roman that Jewish nationalists found him hiding in an aqueduct and killed him.

Paul's words so enraged Ananias that, in violation of the law, he commanded that Paul be struck on the mouth.

The Retort 23:3-5

Before the High Priest Was Identified 23:3

"Then Paul said to him, 'God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! And do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?' "

The expression *whitewashed wall* refers to a wall that is tottering, and its condition is disguised by a generous application of white-wash. Many commentators criticize Paul for this remark. The criticism seems to me to be a bit sanctimonious. It is a legitimate response to injustice—Ananias was just what Paul said he was—a whitewashed wall! John the Baptist called the Pharisees and Saducees *a brood of vipers*, and we applaud him for it. How is Paul any different?

After the High Priest Was Identified 23:4-5

"But the bystanders said, 'Do you revile God's high priest?' And Paul said, 'I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people' " " "

This was not a normal meeting of the Sanhedrin. Had it been, the high priest would have been presiding and would have been identifiable by his clothing. It must be remembered that Paul had visited Jerusalem only sporadically over the preceding twenty years. As Paul cites Exodus 22:28, the apology was probably made more to the office than to the man personally.

The Resumption 23:6

"But perceiving that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul began crying out in the Council, 'Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!' "

Beginning once again with the common formal address (see verse 1), Paul attempts to resume his defense. This time, however, Paul seizes the offensive. Though a Christian, Paul could still be called a Pharisee because of his respect for the Law and his belief in the resurrection. Paul had addressed the Roman commander as a Roman citizen; now he addresses the Sanhedrin as a Pharisee.

With the statement of verse 6, Paul hits at the heart of the issue—the resurrection. When Paul speaks of the resurrection of the dead, is he referring to the resurrection of Jesus or the resurrection of men? To answer, we should recall that the New Testament always views the resurrection of Christ as the efficient cause of the resurrection of believers. This being the case, it seems best not to create a dichotomy between the two for they go hand in hand.

The Dissension 23:7-10

"And as he said this, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. ⁸For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. ⁹And there arose a great uproar; and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and began to argue heatedly, saying, 'We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?' ¹⁰And as a great dissension was developing, the

commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks."

These verses are filled with words of conflict. Verse 7 speaks of *dissension* and an assembly that was *divided*. Verse 9 speaks of a *great uproar* and heated argument, and verse 10 uses the word *dissension* again.

Once again the discussion becomes so volatile that violence is feared, and the Roman commander sends in his soldiers to save Paul from decapitation. The commander seeks the truth, but the radicalism of Judaism engages in another irrational foray and intervention becomes necessary.

The Encouragement 23:11

"But on the night immediately following, the Lord stood at his side and said, 'Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also.' "

Paul's worst fears about his reception in Jerusalem have come to fruition, and it appears his life would end here with the journey to Rome and Spain never made. Paul spends the night in his cell in the Roman fortress, probably despairing of life itself. The appearance of the Lord is opportune and assures Paul of his coming journey to Rome. If he is certain of Rome, he will survive Jerusalem. These words must have been Paul's mainstay in the next two years.

THE PLOT TO KILL PAUL 23:12-35

Its Design 23:12-15

Element One: The Vows 23:12-13

"And when it was day, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. ¹³And there were more than forty who formed this plot."

Forty Jews "anathematized themselves" (*bound themselves*). *Anathema* means *to be cursed of God*. They were willing to risk the wrath of God if they failed in their plot to kill Paul.

The vow does not mean that they would starve themselves if their attempt to kill Paul was unsuccessful. The rabbis recognized four kinds of vows. First were vows of incitement; second, vows of exaggeration; third, vows in error; and finally, vows one could not fulfill. This left plenty of latitude to get out of a vow if one wished to do so.

Element Two: The Sanhedrin 23:14-15

"And they came to the chief priests and the elders, and said, 'We have bound ourselves under a solemn oath to taste nothing until we have killed Paul. ¹⁵Now, therefore, you and the Council notify the commander to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case by a more thorough investigation; and we for our part are ready to slay him before he comes near the place.' "

The streets of Jerusalem were narrow, and the distance from the fortress to the meeting place of the Sanhedrin would make the ambush of Paul a fairly simple matter, especially in the hands of such radical men. They asked the Council to play its part in getting Paul transferred to their hands.

Their appeal to the Council shows they considered this murder a religious duty as Jesus had predicted in John 16:1-2. Their sin is many faceted: hypocrisy, deceit, and murder all in the name of God. Roman soldiers would accompany Paul; so whether the ambush was successful or not, there would be loss of life. Their fanatical devotion makes them willing to perish.

Its Discovery 23:16-22**The Request 23:16-18**

"But the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush, and he came and entered the barracks and told Paul. ¹⁷And Paul called one of the centurions to him and said, 'Lead this young man to the commander, for he has something to report to him.' ¹⁸So he took him and led him to the commander and said, 'Paul the prisoner called me to him and asked me to lead this young man to you since he has something to tell you.' "

This event is reminiscent of God's providential care for His own as recorded in the book of Esther where the king is reading in his annals one night and discovers that Mordecai had been unrewarded for a deed done in the past. Upon this discovery, events transpire resulting in the delivery of the Jews from death.

Here in Acts 23, we learn that Paul's nephew hears of the plans for ambush and reports them to Paul. God's providential care is always directed toward His own. This event also shows the advantage of Roman citizenship, for only a Roman citizen could receive visitors and request favors of the guard. God rules by natural and supernatural means. Here the two are combined.

The Revelation 23:19-22

"And the commander took him by the hand and stepping aside, began to inquire of him privately, 'What is it that you have to report to me?' ²⁰And he said, 'The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down tomorrow to the Council, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more thoroughly about him. ²¹So do not listen to them, for more than forty of them are lying in wait for him who have bound themselves under a curse not to

eat or drink until they slay him; and now they are ready and waiting for the promise from you.’²²Therefore the commander let the young man go, instructing him, ‘Tell no one that you have notified me of these things.’ ”

The commander was a perceptive man and took warning seriously. He knew that Ananias was capable of such action, and he understood the depth of Jewish hatred toward Paul. The commander was also decisive. He heard the report, took it seriously, dismissed the young man, warned him not to tell anyone else of the plot, and proceeded to make a plan to thwart the plot.

Its Defeat 23:23-35

The Preparation of the Escort 23:23-24

“And he called to him two of the centurions, and said, ‘Get two hundred soldiers ready by the third hour of the night to proceed to Caesarea, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen.’²⁴They were also to provide mounts to put Paul on and bring him safely to Felix the governor.”

It was sixty miles from Jerusalem to Caesarea, and the distance had to be covered quickly and safely. The commander could not afford to risk the murder of a Roman citizen, and he was convinced this is what would happen if Paul were kept in Jerusalem. Paul would be safer in Caesarea in the jurisdiction of Felix.

Two centurions are summoned and ordered to get ready an escort of infantry, armed troops and cavalry; horses and mules were to be provided for Paul. The word *mounts* may mean *pack animals* or *riding animals*. The presence of the infantrymen would provide the needed security; the cavalrymen would provide the needed speed.

The Content of the Letter 23:25-30

“And he wrote a letter having this form: ²⁶‘Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix, greetings. ²⁷When this man was arrested by the Jews and was about to be slain by them, I came upon them with the troops and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman. ²⁸And wanting to ascertain the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their Council; ²⁹and I found him to be accused over questions about their Law, but under no accusation deserving death or imprisonment. ³⁰And when I was informed that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, also instructing his accusers to bring charges against him before you.’ ”

The word *form* means *type*—the commander wrote a letter like the one which follows. Luke was not able to read the correspondence of a letter from the commander to the procurator. He probably learned of its contents from Paul whose initial questioning followed the outline of the letter.

Naming the sender, address of the recipient, and the greetings follow the form of letters of antiquity. After speaking of the com-

mander numerous times, Luke now reveals his name to be Claudius Lysias.

The letter summarizes events from the riot at Jerusalem to the present moment. Claudius Lysias seems to stretch the truth a bit when he pictures himself as rescuing Paul because of his Roman citizenship. In reality, one recalls that his citizenship was revealed to the commander when he was about to have him scourged.

The commander makes it clear that the issue is strictly Jewish and religious. Paul had broken no Roman law that was worthy of death or even imprisonment. This was significant for Paul's fortunes as he appears before Felix.

The Journey to Caesarea 23:31-35

"So the soldiers, in accordance with their orders, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. ³²But the next day, leaving the horsemen to go on with him, they returned to the barracks. ³³And when these had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him. ³⁴And when he had read it, he asked from what province he was; and when he learned that he was from Cilicia, ³⁵he said, 'I will give you a hearing after your accusers arrive also,' giving orders for him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium."

The military escort left Jerusalem at 9:00 p.m. and completed the journey by morning. Antipatris was about thirty-five miles from Jerusalem. At this point, part of the escort returns to Jerusalem since Paul was now safely separated from his Jewish enemies. The cavalry accompanies Paul for the journey from Antipatris to Caesarea, about twenty-seven more miles.

Upon arrival, Felix reads the letter and inquires concerning the province from which Paul came. This was done in order to establish jurisdiction. Coming from Cilicia, Felix was free to hear his case without consultation with any other Roman official. It is interesting to note the care with which the Roman officials proceed in a legal and orderly manner compared to the irrational, illegal, and disorderly conduct of the Jews in Jerusalem.

Paul Before the Judges of Rome

or “The Roman Trio: Felix, Festus, Agrippa”

Acts 24:1-26:32

THE OUTLINE

- A. Paul Before Felix 24:1-27
 - 1. The Charges of the Jews 24:1-9
 - 2. The Defense of the Apostle Paul 24:10-21
 - 3. The Response of Felix 24:22-27
- B. Paul’s Defense Before Festus 25:1-22
 - 1. Festus Hears Paul 25:1-12
 - 2. Festus Consults Agrippa 25:13-22
- C. Paul’s Defense Before Agrippa 25:23-26:32
 - 1. Festus Introduces Paul 25:23-27
 - 2. Paul Presents His Defense 26:1-23
 - 3. The Concluding Trialogue 26:24-32

THE COMMENTARY

PAUL BEFORE FELIX 24:1-27

Luke gives almost equal space to the three aspects of Paul’s appearance before Felix. First, he presents the Jewish charges (24:1-9); second, he informs us of Paul’s response to the charges (24:10-21); third, he tells of Felix’s response (24:22-27).

The charges were skillfully devious, and Felix was notoriously corrupt. From Paul’s appearance, two conclusions may be reached. First, Christianity had nothing to do with political sedition. Christians were not attempting to topple Rome or even threaten it. Second, Jewish opposition came about because Christianity

claimed to fulfill the hope of Judaism as set forth in the Old Testament.

The Charges of the Jews 24:1-9

A Time Notation 24:1a

“And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders, with a certain attorney named Tertullus; and they brought charges to the governor against Paul.”

To what should we reference the five days? It appears that Luke means five days after arrival in Caesarea. However, the words of Acts 24:11 eliminate this possibility, telling us Paul arrived in Jerusalem to worship twelve days ago. Seven days passed before his arrest recorded in Acts 21:27-33. This would indicate that Ananias and his followers arrived in Caesarea five days after Paul's arrest. The arrest happened on or just after the seventh and final day of purification.

A Preface of Flattery 24:2-4

“And after Paul had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying to the governor, ‘Since we have through you attained much peace, and since by your providence reforms are being carried out for this nation, ³we acknowledge this in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness. ⁴But, that I may not weary you any further, I beg you to grant us, by your kindness, a brief hearing.’ ”

These words are pure flattery. Very few Jews, if any, would have joined Tertullus in what he said on this occasion. Tertullus speaks of the peace that Felix had brought. Tacitus has an interesting remark, saying, “The Romans create a desolation and call it peace.” The word *kindness* means *clemency and moderation*, hardly an honest description of ferocious Felix. A promise of brevity was commonly made on such occasions as this. Whether or not the promise was kept, it at least secured the initial attention of those to whom one spoke.

A Presentation of Charges 24:5-8a

“ ‘For we have found this man a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. ⁶And he even tried to desecrate the temple; and then we arrested him. [And we wanted to judge him according to our own Law. ⁷But Lysias the commander came along, and with much violence took him out of our hands, ordering his accusers to come before you.]’ ”

The word *pest* referred to a diseased bird of prey. Applied to a human being, the expression “a sore spot” among the Jews would catch the idea. To foment uprisings among the Jews would be to commit the political crime of sedition. Their intent is to show that Paul is a political, not a religious, offender. This was an especially

serious charge to bring before Felix. He had crucified many who created uprisings that disturbed the Pax Romana.

The word *ringleader* was a military term for the man on the front right of a contingency of soldiers. From the Jewish and Roman standpoint, the Nazarenes were a sect with no legal standing

To call the Jewish response to Paul in the temple an *arrest* is to stretch truth to the breaking point. The word *lynch* would have conveyed the truth of the matter. Tertullus does a masterful, though dishonest, job of weaving an accusation calculated to bring a capital charge against Paul.

Acts 24:6b-8a is found in brackets, indicating a textual problem. The NASB marginal note simply says many manuscripts do not contain these words. Further explanation of this and other New Testament textual variants are discussed in *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* by Bruce M. Metzger.

The Transition to the Judgment of Felix 24:8b-9

“ ‘And by examining him yourself concerning all these matters, you will be able to ascertain the things of which we accuse him.’⁹ And the Jews also joined in the attack, asserting that these things were so.”

Tertullus’s speech began in a persuasive manner but now seems to lose its rhetorical force. He certainly went all out to show Paul guilty of capital offense under both Jewish and Roman law. The Jews present with him contribute nothing but mindless affirmation.

The Defense of the Apostle Paul 24:10-21

His Defense Against the Sedition Charge 24:10-13

“And when the governor had nodded for him to speak, Paul responded: ‘Knowing that for many years you have been a judge to this nation, I cheerfully make my defense,¹¹ since you can take note of the fact that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship.¹² And neither in the temple, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city itself did they find me carrying on a discussion with anyone or causing a riot.¹³ Nor can they prove to you the charges of which they now accuse me.’ ”

The Roman and Jewish courts stand in complete contrast. The Roman court was orderly; the Jewish court was chaos as Acts 23:2, 7, 9, and 10 show. The treatment of Jesus before the Jews and before the Romans is parallel to that of Paul.

There is obvious contrast between Tertullus and Paul. Tertullus engages in pure flattery. Paul is courteous and objective. He credits Felix with both knowledge and experience.

Paul begins by calling attention to the recency of his arrival in Jerusalem. The expression *went up* is used of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and especially the temple. Felix would understand the

timing, as Paul arrived for the Feast of Pentecost when all Jews went to Jerusalem.

Paul says the purpose of his visit was *to worship*. It was important that Felix understand that the visit was religious, not political. That visit had lasted only a week before he was arrested—hardly enough time to organize a revolution against Rome! When Paul uses the word *discussion* in verse 12, he uses a word that refers to public discourse (Acts 17:1-2, 17; 18:4, 19; 20:7). Paul did not carry on public discourse or create a disturbance with anyone, anywhere!

Paul brings his defense against sedition to a close in verse 13. The word *prove* means to put evidence alongside argument. Paul engaged in none of his normal activities of preaching.

His Defense Against the Ringleader Charge 24:14-16

“ ‘But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law, and that is written in the Prophets; ¹⁵having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. ¹⁶In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and among men.’ ”

Paul now exposes the real reason why Ananias and the Jewish elders oppose him. Paul’s thesis is this: As a follower of *the Way*, he stands in harmony with all Old Testament truth. Paul uses the practice of Demosthenes and the orators: deny and contradict, and then acknowledge and confirm. The denial is found in Acts 24:10-13, and the acknowledgment is found in 24:14-16.

Calling Christianity *the Way* means way of thinking, way of living, and way of worshiping. Paul shows that the evaluation of the Jewish court concerning the Way is wrong. First, he worships the God of Israel. The words *our fathers* tie Paul solidly to the Old Testament. When he worships as a Christian, he worships no new God. Paul has not abandoned the God of the Hebrew Scriptures. Second, he reveres the Scriptures of Israel. The word *written* is perfect tense, meaning *stands completely and permanently and fully written*. Third, he clings to the hope of Israel. Examination of his later defense before Agrippa will show his belief in the resurrection incorporated the resurrection of Christ as well (Acts 26:6-8, 22-23).

His Defense Against the Profanation Charge 24:17-21

“ ‘Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings; ¹⁸in which they found me occupied in the temple, having been purified, without any crowd or uproar. But there were certain Jews from Asia—¹⁹who ought to have been present before you, and to make accusation, if they should have anything against me. ²⁰Or else let these men themselves tell what misdeed they found when I stood before the Council, ²¹other than for this one statement which I shouted out while

standing among them, "For the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you today." ' ' "

Paul focuses on two things: his legitimacy and his accusers' absence. Paul had come to Jerusalem to perform a legitimate function, *to bring alms*; did so in a legitimate condition, *having been purified*; and with legitimate demeanor, *without any crowd or uproar*.

On the other hand, Paul's accusers were not present in the courtroom. Roman law provided for heavy punishment for accusers who abandoned their charges. As in our own jurisprudence, when the accuser is not present, the charge is often dropped. But why did Tertullus not see to it that the accusers made an appearance? Probably because he did not feel they would have anything to contribute to the prosecution of Paul. And why not? Because they had nothing that would stand up in the courts of Rome.

The Response of Felix 24:22-27

As Revealed in Public Statement 24:22-23

"But Felix, having a more exact knowledge about the Way, put them off, saying, 'When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case.'²³ And he gave orders to the centurion for him to be kept in custody and yet have some freedom, and not to prevent any of his friends from ministering to him."

Felix was an enlightened man; he knew truth (24:22) and he feared truth (24:25). At the same time, Felix was a procrastinator (24:25). Did Lysias ever come to Caesarea? Or we might ask, Why should he? He had already given a written deposition of the events. Perhaps waiting for him to arrive was only a delaying technique. Whatever happened, Felix's procrastination is obvious.

Felix sought to preserve the Pax Romana by removing the possibility of confrontation among the disputants by judicial delay'

As Revealed in Personal Conversation 24:24-27

ITS CONTENT 24:24-25A

"But some days later, Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul, and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus.²⁵ And as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come..."

Paul spoke of the person of Jesus Christ and man's relationship to Him. The preposition *in* in the phrase *in Christ Jesus* is the Greek word *eis*. Its basic meaning is *direction toward*. Rightly directed faith brings salvation, and Paul conveys this message to Felix. Righteousness, self-control, and judgment to come were subjects that Felix and Drusilla desperately needed to learn.

ITS EFFECT 24:25B-27

"...Felix became frightened and said, 'Go away for the present, and when I find time, I will summon you.'²⁶ At the same time too, he was hoping that money would be given him by Paul; therefore he also used to send for him quite often and converse with him. ²⁷But after two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus; and wishing to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul imprisoned."

There are four elements at work in these verses. A spiritual work was being done because Felix showed concern over the person of Christ and ethical matters. Psychologically, Felix was a procrastinator with all the attendant pain that goes with it. The materialistic fact is seen in his desire to gain money from Paul. Finally, the political aspect is seen in his desire to please the Jews—expediency is the word.

PAUL'S DEFENSE BEFORE FESTUS 25:1-22**Festus Hears Paul 25:1-12**

This is the briefest of Paul's defenses, and most of it parallels his words spoken before Felix. The new element in this defense is found in verse 11, *I appeal to Caesar*. This sets the stage for the final part of the book of Acts—Paul's journey to Rome.

Every Roman citizen had the right to appeal his case to Caesar. But how could Caesar hear every citizen who appealed to him? The answer lies in an understanding of Roman law. The right of appeal had certain conditions attached. The appeal was made from a capital offense trial held before a provincial administrator. The case had to be extra ordinem, meaning it went beyond the ordinary jurisdiction of the provincial judge. Passages dealing with Paul's appeal to Caesar are Acts 25:11-12, 21, 25-26; 26:32, and 28:19.

At first look, one would wonder why Paul would rather stand trial before the emperor Nero than before Festus. Nero was emperor from A.D. 54-68. The first nine years of his rule were under the influence of the stoic philosopher Seneca. For Christianity, this was somewhat of a golden age. When Paul made his appeal in about A.D. 60, there was nothing to indicate what Nero's later personal character and disposition toward Christians would be. The last five years of his reign were radically different as he became an arch enemy of Christianity.

Festus Visits Jerusalem 25:1-5

"Festus therefore, having arrived in the province, three days later went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. ²And the chief priests and the leading men of the Jews brought charges against Paul; and they were urging him, ³requesting a concession against Paul, that he might have him brought to Jerusalem (at the same time, setting an ambush to kill him on the way). ⁴Festus then answered that Paul was being kept in custody at Caesarea

and that he himself was about to leave shortly. ⁵Therefore, ' he said, 'let the influential men among you go there with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them prosecute him.' "

Felix delays his decision about Paul's case for two years. We should try to identify with how Paul must have felt (or perhaps how we would have felt). He spent two years in jail while the judge dilly-dallied around over what to do with him. It must have been especially painful, realizing he was innocent of all charges.

These two years also reveal the inveterate hatred of the Jews for Paul. One would think not seeing Paul for two years would have allowed some time for tempers to cool.

As the new procurator, it seemed appropriate to make a journey to Jerusalem to meet the leaders of the people he would govern. Ananias was no longer high priest. He had been succeeded by Ishmael who had been appointed by Agrippa in the final days of Felix.

The Jews were probably counting on Festus's lack of experience. If, so they thought, they could convince him to transfer Paul from Caesarea, they would have two chances to kill him. Their first chance would be an ambush somewhere along the road from Caesarea. Their second chance would stem from the change in venue. If tried in a Roman court, it would be necessary to prove sedition; if tried in Jerusalem, the sedition charge could be forgotten and Paul could be tried for profaning the temple. This was a capital offense under Jewish law, and the Romans almost always upheld the verdict reached by the Sanhedrin.

Festus unknowingly upset the Jewish plans. His thinking was this: Paul is already in custody; I am returning to Caesarea soon; it makes no sense to move him. The word *therefore* that begins verse 5 shows that Festus's proposal denotes orderly procedure, fair investigation, and legal procedure.

Festus Returns to Caesarea 25:6-12

THE COURT CONVENES 25:6-8

"And after he had spent not more than eight or ten days among them, he went down to Caesarea; and on the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. ⁷And after he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him which they could not prove; ⁸while Paul said in his own defense, 'I have committed no offense either against the Law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar.' "

The case against Paul is opened once again, before a new judge and after a delay of two years. Festus is pictured by Luke as a prompt and punctual man. In the total absence of proof, Paul needs to do no more than deny the charges and this he does. His opponents produce no witness and offer no proof acceptable in the Roman court.

THE DIALOGUE DEVELOPS 25:9-12

"But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, 'Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me on these charges?' ¹⁰But Paul said, 'I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you also very well know. ¹¹If then I am a wrongdoer, and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if none of those things is true of which these men accuse me, no one can hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar.' ¹²Then when Festus had conferred with his council, he answered, 'You have appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you shall go.' "

As a favor to the Jews, Festus asks Paul if he would accept a change of venue. Had Festus been convinced that Paul had profaned the temple, he would probably have agreed to hand Paul over to the Sanhedrin. Paul knows the motivation of the Jews. He knows that to return to Jerusalem would put him in jeopardy all over again. Further, if Festus made the first concession to the Sanhedrin, what would hinder him from making further ones—all of them prejudicial to Paul's safety. Paul also knew that Felix had been experienced in dealing with the Jews; Festus, on the other hand, was a novice.

Festus's meeting with his council was not to determine whether Paul's appeal to Caesar should be allowed. Festus had to determine several things. First, he had to decide whether the charges were *ordae* or *extra ordinem*. Did they fall within normal jurisdiction of his provincial responsibilities? Second, would it be appropriate to acquit the prisoner so as to make the appeal unnecessary?

In answer to these questions, Festus decides as follows. First, since Paul was charged with two capital offenses, his case is *extra ordinem*. Second, though he had the power to acquit, this would be an unwise move toward the people he was charged to govern. To acquit Paul would have been legal, but it would have been political suicide.

Festus Consults Agrippa 25:13-22

The Arrival of Agrippa 25:13

"Now when several days had elapsed, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea, and paid their respects to Festus."

In sending Paul to Rome, it would be necessary for Festus to send along a report of what had happened. Herein he faced a difficulty. It was uncertain what the charges were; and the more he tried to determine the complaint of the Jews, the more confusing it had become. It was obvious they wanted to implicate Paul on a capital offense charge, but neither Felix nor Festus could determine any grounds for a charge.

The arrival of Agrippa provided a solution to the dilemma. Agrippa II was the great-grandson of Herod the Great. He also had a reputation of being an authority on the Jewish religion—if anyone

could help Festus, this was the man. Bernice was Agrippa's sister who was one year younger than he.

The Information About Paul 25:14-22

FESTUS'S RESPONSE TO THE JEWS 25:14-19

"And while they were spending many days there, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, 'There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix; ¹⁵and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews brought charges against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation upon him. ¹⁶And I answered them that it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over any man before the accused meets his accusers face to face, and has an opportunity to make his defense against the charges. ¹⁷And so after they had assembled here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal, and ordered the man to be brought. ¹⁸And when the accusers stood up, they began bringing charges against him not of such crimes as I was expecting; ¹⁹but they simply had some points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a certain dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive.'"

Paul's defense before King Agrippa is found in Acts 25:23-26:32. It is Paul's longest and greatest defense. It is unique in that it does not focus on the charges brought by the Jews but on Paul himself and the gospel he preached. Acts 25:14-22 is transitional. It links the defense before Festus with the defense before Agrippa. The transition focuses on Festus.

- **It Reveals His Sense of Justice 25:16**

The Jews want Paul handed over to them on the basis of charges they had made. Festus refuses because Paul has not met his accusers face to face and has not had an opportunity to defend himself against those charges.

- **It Reveals His Conscientious Attitude 25:17**

His attitude toward his duty is revealed in his prompt handling of the case. He convened court the day after he returned from Jerusalem. He was surprised to find that the charges were religious in nature and had nothing to do with charges that would fall within the jurisdiction of Roman law.

- **It Reveals His Insight into the Prevailing Issues 25:18-19**

He saw that the resurrection was the major issue. This does not mean he understood the import of the resurrection, however, as he mentions it as a passing matter.

FESTUS'S FRUSTRATION OVER THE JEWS 25:20-22

" 'And being at a loss how to investigate such matters, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there stand trial on these matters. ²¹But when Paul appealed to be held in custody for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him to be kept in custody until I send him to Caesar.' ²²And

Agrippa said to Festus, 'I also would like to hear the man myself.' 'Tomorrow,' he said, 'you shall hear him.' "

Festus's sense of futility is obvious. One can almost see him shrug his shoulders as he admits his inability to make a judgment in the case. Agrippa apparently knew enough of Christianity to have his appetite whetted by this curious case. He will see Paul the next day.

PAUL'S DEFENSE BEFORE AGRIPPA 25:23-26:32

Festus Introduces Paul 25:23-27

Agrippa's Arrival 25:23

"And so, on the next day when Agrippa had come together with Bernice, amid great pomp, and had entered the auditorium accompanied by the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in."

Agrippa and his sister Bernice, along with other officials, enter. Josephus reports that there were five auxiliary cohorts at Caesarea, which would mean the presence of five commanders

The word *pomp* translates a Greek word found only here in the New Testament, making the scene unique. The pageantry was spectacular—Agrippa's kingly robes, Bernice in her brilliance, and the military uniforms and accoutrements of the officers were impressive. They knew little of true greatness as Paul stood before them in his inglorious chains—at least inglorious to them. Had they listened to Paul's words and been able to look into the future, they would have seen how ephemeral their glory was. But instead they entered with pomp—the Greek word *phantasia*—our English *fantasy*! So much for the glory of this world.

Festus's Summation 25:24-27

"And Festus said, 'King Agrippa, and all you gentlemen here present with us, you behold this man about whom all the people of the Jews appealed to me, both at Jerusalem and here, loudly declaring that he ought not to live any longer. ²⁵But I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death; and since he himself appealed to the Emperor, I decided to send him. ²⁶Yet I have nothing definite about him to write to my lord. Therefore I have brought him before you all and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the investigation has taken place, I may have something to write. ²⁷For it seems absurd to me in sending a prisoner, not to indicate also the charges against him.' "

Festus is convinced that Paul is guilty of no capital offense. Guilt or innocence is not the issue as far as he is concerned. His problem is that Paul has appealed to Caesar and cannot be denied this right, but what shall he write in the absence of a charge?

Paul Presents His Defense 26:1-23

Paul's Exordium 26:1-3

"And Agrippa said to Paul, 'You are permitted to speak for yourself.' Then Paul stretched out his hand and proceeded to make his defense: ²'In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today; ³especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.' "

Agrippa was an expert on Jewish matters. The word *customs* refers both to legal and religious matters, and *questions* refers to subjects of dispute among the Jews.

This defense is to be made without Jewish presence or interruption. Paul had waited for an opportunity to present an orderly defense for many years. At last he stands before a knowledgeable judge without a hostile audience.

Paul's Background 26:4-8

HIS PAST COMMITMENT TO JUDAISM 26:4-5

" 'So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem; ⁵since they have known about me for a long time previously, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect in our religion.' "

Instead of repeating facts concerning his past, he merely refers to them as well-known among all the Jews. The words *if they are willing to testify* show that the Jews wished to deny what they really knew to be true.

HIS PRESENT COMMITMENT TO CHRISTIANITY 26:6-8

" 'And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; ⁷the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve God night and day. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews. ⁸Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?' "

Ironically, Paul stands before Agrippa, not for abandoning the Jewish hope, but because he stands faithful to it. In verse 7 Paul gives more explicit explanation of the hope spoken of in verse 6. The word *Jews* is emphatic—accused by *Jews*, of all people! We could paraphrase saying, "I have upheld the hope of the Jews, and I now stand on trial because of these same Jews whose hope I uphold!" Paul is emphasizing the irony of the whole thing.

Paul's Persecuting Zeal 26:9-11

" 'So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority

from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. ¹¹And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.' "

Paul argues that he understands the Jewish frame of mind because it was once his. His persecution of the church was conceived of as his duty to God. These verses are the most powerful statement of opposition to Christianity found in the New Testament. Paul's opposition to Christians was intense, continuous, unabated, and unrestricted in geographical outreach.

Paul did not wish to make martyrs of Christians, he wished to make apostates of them by attempting to force them to blaspheme. As far as we know, he did not succeed. The early Christians preferred death to apostasy.

Paul's Heavenly Vision 26:12-18

HIS LIFE-CHANGING ENCOUNTER 26:12-15

" 'While thus engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, ¹³at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. ¹⁴And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads."¹⁵And I said, "Who art Thou, Lord? " And the Lord said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." ' "

Paul's experience was sudden and dramatic. His persecuting zeal was at fever pitch. Paul was in the very act of carrying out the activity described in verses 9-11 when the Lord appeared to him.

In the three accounts of Paul's conversion, only this one contains the words *It is hard for you to kick against the goads*. In the Greek world, this was a well-known expression for opposition to deity. It implies that in the depths of Paul's mind, thoughts that Christianity might be right had already begun to grow. Perhaps Stephen's arguments had been more cogent than Paul thought.

HIS LIFE-CHANGING COMMISSION 26:16-18

" ' "But arise, and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; ¹⁷delivering you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, ¹⁸to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me." ' "

The terms used by the Lord in these words remained in Paul's mind ever after. Moving *from darkness to light*, transfer *from the*

dominion of Satan, and forgiveness of sins are mentioned in his epistles. See Colossians 1:12-14 for an example of his use of these terms.

This account omits any mention of human aid such as those who led him into Damascus or the instructions coming from Ananias. The emphasis here is on the directness of the commission from the Lord himself apart from any human intermediary.

Paul's Early Ministry 26:19-23

HIS OBEDIENCE 26:19-20

" 'Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision,²⁰ but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.' "

In verse 19 Paul describes his acceptance of the commission, and in verse 20 he tells of his execution of the commission. None more firmly rejected works as a means of salvation, and none more firmly demanded good works after salvation.

HIS ARREST 26:21

" 'For this reason some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death.' "

This reason refers to his proclamation of the same salvation to both Jews and Gentiles. Agrippa, being an expert in Jewish affairs, understood very well what this meant. This is the first time the reason for Paul's arrest is clearly stated and understood by the judge. The Asian Jews had said Paul profaned the temple—an utter lie. The same Jews had said Paul was guilty of sedition against Rome—another lie. The issue is at last made clear. The Jews hate Paul because he placed the Gentile on equal footing with the Jew through the proclamation of the gospel to them.

HIS TEACHING 26:22-23

•Its Harmony with Old Testament Truth 26:22

" 'And so, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place...' "

A massive presentation of Old Testament predictions is implied in the words *the Prophets and Moses*.

•Its Harmony with Old Testament Prophecy 26:23

" '...that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He should be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.' "

The Old Testament predicted that the Messiah would suffer death and rise from the dead. It also predicted that salvation would be proclaimed to all men. In spite of Old Testament predictions of the

suffering of the Messiah, pre-Christian Judaism never conceived of a suffering Messiah. If so, no extant literature shows it. Suffering, resurrection, and proclamation were tenets of New Testament Christianity.

The Concluding Trialogue 26:24-32

Festus Interrupts 26:24

"And while Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, 'Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad.' "

Festus recognized Paul to be a man of great learning, and it seemed obvious to him that such learning had driven him insane. How could Paul talk so passionately of things that would have no significance to the Roman mind? Why would a man wish to antagonize the entire Jewish nation by talk such as this? Festus can only conclude that Paul is insane.

Paul Replies 26:25-26

"But Paul said, 'I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. ²⁶For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner...' "

The words *sober truth* are literally *truth and rationality*. Soberness indicates the condition of entire command over one's passions and desires. It means his words have nothing to do with ecstasy or imagination or emotion.

The death and resurrection of Jesus had been proclaimed for almost thirty years, and that proclamation did not consist of clandestine whispers.

Paul Addresses Agrippa 26:27-29

" 'King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do.' ²⁸And Agrippa replied to Paul, 'In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.' ²⁹And Paul said, 'I would 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.' "

Paul's reply apparently embarrassed Agrippa. What would his friend Festus think if he appeared to agree with Paul? Agrippa therefore evades Paul's question. Since he was known as orthodox among the Jews, he could not say he did not believe the prophets. However, if he acknowledged his belief, he would have capitulated to Paul.

Agrippa dismisses the issue with a smile. His words begin with a prepositional phrase *en holigo* that means *in short quantity*. But in short quantity of what—time or words? Either or both is possible.

The word *become* is *poieo* and means *to do* or *to make*. It may mean *to play the Christian*. The words of the King James Version, *almost thou persuades me to become a Christian*, have inspired many sermons and one hymn. It is clear, however, that *almost* is not what Agrippa said.

Paul picks up on the words *in a short time* and, perhaps lifting his chained wrists, makes his final plea for all who hear to believe his message concerning Jesus the Messiah.

As the five defenses of Paul conclude, two observations may be made. First, the Roman sense of justice upheld the ministry of Paul as it did that of Jesus. He fared far better before the civil leaders than before the Jewish leaders. Second, Paul's desire for the salvation of men was greater than his desire for personal comfort, safety, and even justice. He is a prime example of faithfulness to one's calling without consideration of the cost involved. Paul doubtless knew every form of suffering one could experience for the cause of Christ.

Court Adjourns 26:30-32

"And the king arose and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them, ³¹and when they had drawn aside, they began talking to one another, saying, 'This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment.'³²And Agrippa said to Festus, 'This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.' "

Truth had the last word both in what Paul said and in what Agrippa concluded. The report could now be sent to the emperor that Paul had done nothing in Rome's eyes that merited death or even imprisonment. Agrippa comments that if Paul had not appealed to Caesar, he could now go free.

The Journey to Rome

or "The Two Year Ministry Begins"

Acts 27:1-28:31

THE OUTLINE

- A. The Journey Begins 27:1-44
 - 1. Luke's Diary 27:1-12
 - 2. Euraquila's Fury 27:13-44
- B. The Journey Delayed 28:1-10
 - 1. The Arrival Incident 28:1-6
 - 2. The Ongoing Miracles 28:7-10
- C. The Journey Completed 28:11-31
 - 1. The Last Lap 28:11-16
 - 2. The Roman Jews 28:17-31

THE COMMENTARY

THE JOURNEY BEGINS 27:1-44

Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea lasted for two years. Many questions could be asked about these years. How was Paul supported during his imprisonment? Felix thought Paul had money. We are told "he was hoping that money would be given him by Paul" (Acts 24:26). But on what basis did his hope rest? We do not know. How cordial was Paul's relationship to Christians in Jerusalem and Caesarea? Where was Silas? What was Luke doing during this two year period? What about Timothy?

Inability to answer these questions may indicate that Paul was nearing the situation described in II Timothy 4:9-11, 16-18 where he speaks of the absence of all his friends. In the end, the greatest

apostle of the message of the grace of God was abandoned and deserted by all but the Lord. Paul died alone.

Acts 27 and 28 is probably the most vivid example of descriptive writing found in the Bible.

Luke's Diary 27:1-12

The Companions 27:1

"And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they proceeded to deliver Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan cohort named Julius."

Acts 27 opens the final "we" section of Acts and shows Paul has been united with his earlier traveling companions. Luke is going to give us a firsthand account, probably taken from his own diary. Aristarchus, a believer from Rome, is among the group along with prisoners of unknown name and number.

The centurion was apparently part of a special unit of soldiers unattached to any other Roman division—a sort of "special forces" unit. In Latin they were called the *speculatores*.

The narrative that follows is uncomplicated and needs little exposition. One could profit greatly by simply reading through it with a good Bible atlas in hand.

These final chapters picture Paul in a set of circumstances that reveal the real man. He is not facing Jewish opposition or pagan polytheism. He is facing a storm at sea and probable loss of life by drowning. It is significant to note that Paul provides assistance to others on the ship that the experts could not supply.

The changing of ships, the landing at various ports, and the storm at sea were all part of the means by which God led Paul to Rome. Acts 28:14 says *thus we came to Rome*. The word *thus* is an adverb of manner. Acts 27-28 vividly portrays the details of God's manner of leading. As a glance at a map will show, the journey to Rome was not straight; but it was exciting and often terrifying.

The Ship 27:2

"And embarking in an Adramyttian ship, which was about to sail to the regions along the coast of Asia, we put out to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica."

Ships were designated by their home ports. Adramyttium was a seaport linking Asia with Europe. The ship was a coasting vessel and would make many stops en route to its home base. Having unloaded its cargo, it was available for passengers who might want to stop at ports along the way. Paul and his companions will sail over five hundred miles in this ship, later changing to another which is destroyed in the storm, and then yet another that takes them to Rome.

The Itinerary 27:3-12

TO SIDON 27:3

"And the next day we put in at Sidon; and Julius treated Paul with consideration and allowed him to go to his friends and receive care."

Paul receives the first of a number of kindnesses extended from Julius, his jailer. Centurions almost always receive favorable notice in the New Testament (Matthew 8:5-12; Acts 10:1-2).

A church had been established at Sidon as the result of the persecution following the death of Stephen (Acts 11:19). The good treatment of Paul by Julius is probably explained by the orders of Felix found in Acts 24:23.

TO MYRA 27:4-5

"And from there we put out to sea and sailed under the shelter of Cyprus because the winds were contrary. And when we had sailed through the sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia."

To sail under the shelter of Cyprus meant to sail in such a way that the island would provide protection from the wind. At Myra the first part of the journey ended. It was a major port for the ships that moved grain from Egypt to Rome. Egypt was the chief granary of Rome, and the corn trade between Alexandria and Rome was very important. A vessel from that fleet happened to be anchored at Myra.

TO FAIR HAVENS 27:6-12

•The New Ship 27:6-8

"And there the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy, and he put us aboard it. ⁷And when we had sailed slowly for a good many days, and with difficulty had arrived off Cnidus, since the wind did not permit us to go farther, we sailed under the shelter of Crete, off Salmone; ⁸and with difficulty sailing past it we came to a certain place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea."

It took many days to reach Cnidus since it was about 150 miles farther. At Cnidus they had two choices. They could put into port and wait for fair winds. In favor of this option was the double harbor and the good accommodations. However, if they wished to continue sailing, their only course was to run for the eastern extremity of Crete. Then they could sail under the lee of the island. This is what they did.

•The Urgent Warning 27:9-12

"And when considerable time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous, since even the fast was already over, Paul began to admonish them, ¹⁰and said to them, 'Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be attended with damage and great loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.' ¹¹But the centurion was more persuaded by the pilot and the captain of the ship, than by what was being said by Paul. ¹²And

because the harbor was not suitable for wintering, the majority reached a decision to put out to sea from there, if somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there."

The dangerous season for sailing began September 14 and lasted until November 11. After this day, all sailing on the open sea ceased until winter was over. Winter was considered over by the beginning of February at the earliest. They had left Fair Havens about mid-October.

Paul speaks up and issues a warning advising them not to leave Fair Havens. His warning exhibits a superb balance of human responsibility and divine sovereignty. Paul knew he was destined for Rome, but at the same time he took every precaution to make it a safe journey. Paul was less of a risk taker than the pilot of the ship.

The pilot and captain of the ship are probably the same person. The pilot had two major responsibilities: safe navigation and discipline. Ignoring Paul's advice, they leave port "on a wing and a prayer."

Euraquila's Fury 27:13-44

The First Two Weeks 27:13-26

THE STORM 27:13-20

"And when a moderate south wind came up, supposing that they had gained their purpose, they weighed anchor and began sailing along Crete, close inshore. ¹⁴But before very long there rushed down from the land a violent wind, called Euraquilo; ¹⁵and when the ship was caught in it, and could not face the wind, we gave way to it, and let ourselves be driven along. ¹⁶And running under the shelter of a small island called Clauda, we were scarcely able to get the ship's boat under control. ¹⁷And after they had hoisted it up, they used supporting cables in undergirding the ship; and fearing that they might run aground on the shallows of Syrtis, they let down the sea anchor, and so let themselves be driven along. ¹⁸The next day as we were being violently storm-tossed, they began to jettison the cargo; ¹⁹and on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. ²⁰And since neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small storm was assailing us, from then on all hope of our being saved was gradually abandoned."

Everything started out extremely well. The gentle southern breeze was ideal; and all they had to do was round Cape Metala, and the boat would be gently wafted into the Port of Phoenix.

As soon as they rounded the Cape, the hurricane hit! This particular violent wind was so well-known that sailors named it Euraquilo, a combination of a Greek and Latin word meaning *Northeaster*. It was described as a *violent wind* (*tuphonikos*, our *typhoon*).

Luke's eyewitness-participant description of the storm is vivid. The wind was so fierce that the ship was driven almost twenty-five miles backward to a small island called Clauda. Being on the leeward side of the island, they had a short time to take some emergency measures.

They began by pulling the dinghy on board. It was usually towed astern but was brought in during bad weather. Then they undergirded the ship using cables. *Supporting cables* was a nautical term used to describe several procedures. First, it could refer to ropes pulled under the ship and secured above to reinforce the hull. Second, they could be placed around the ship for the same reason. Third, the ropes could be used to tie the stem and stern together to keep the ship from breaking its back. Next, they let down the sea anchor. They did all of this in order to keep the ship from the sandbars of Africa. Spare gear and cargo was all jettisoned.

Finally, the sun and stars disappeared and with them all hope. This made navigation impossible—they had no idea where they were and no means of determining location.

THE VISION 27:21-26

"And when they had gone a long time without food, then Paul stood up in their midst and said, 'Men, you ought to have followed my advice and not to have set sail from Crete, and incurred this damage and loss. ²²And yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there shall be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. ²³For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, ²⁴saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.' ²⁵Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God, that it will turn out exactly as I have been told. But we must run aground on a certain island.' "

Paul begins with an "I told you so" introduction. It is good to know that Paul loves those words as much as most of us do. It shows how human he is. Apparently Paul had shared the general pessimism of all on board until the angel appeared to him. The advice not to sail found in Acts 27:10 was not a revelation from God but merely the words of an experienced traveler. One should remember that Paul had been in two previous shipwrecks (II Corinthians 11). The words that Paul is about to speak are not based on experience at sea but on revelation from God.

Paul points out that he has received a revelation concerning the outcome of the storm (27:22-24). It would be easy to conclude that since he has been assured that there would be no loss of life, all on board could do as they wished and throw caution to the wind. Not so! Paul says they must remain in the ship to be saved (Acts 27:31). The word of God does not recognize tension between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man.

Several important ideas emerge in these verses. First, God cared for Paul in the midst of the storm, not from the storm or out of the

storm. God allowed Paul plenty of time to fear for his life. Second, God supported Paul with the truth that he was safe until he had finished his assigned course of life. Finally, even a believer as great as Paul needed the reassurance of repeated truth (Acts 23:11, 27:24).

The Struggle to Survive 27:27-44

THE SHALLOW WATERS 27:27-29

"But when the fourteenth night had come, as we were being driven about in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors began to surmise that they were approaching some land. ²⁸And they took soundings, and found it to be about twenty fathoms; and a little farther on they took another sounding and found it to be fifteen fathoms. ²⁹And fearing that we might run aground somewhere on the rocks, they cast four anchors from the stem and wished for daybreak."

The soundings indicated they were passing Koura on the east coast of Malta. For explanation of seafaring technicalities, one should consult *The Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul* by James Smith. *St. Paul the Traveler* by Ramsay is also excellent. Ramsay reflects a good knowledge of the social history of the Roman Empire in the first century.

THE DISLOYAL SAILORS 27:30-32

"And as the sailors were trying to escape from the ship, and had let down the ship's boat into the sea, on the pretense of intending to lay out anchors from the bow, ³¹Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, 'Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved.' ³²Then the soldiers cut away the ropes and the ship's boat, and let it fall away."

The plot of the sailors was sinister. Their selfish attempt to save their own lives violated all tradition of the sea. Had they escaped, it would have been impossible to reach shore the next morning without a full crew. This time Julius listens to Paul and orders the sailors to let the dinghy fall away.

THE ADVICE OF PAUL 27:33-37

"And until the day was about to dawn, Paul was encouraging them all to take some food, saying, 'Today is the fourteenth day that you have been constantly watching and going without eating, having taken nothing. ³⁴Therefore I encourage you to take some food, for this is for your preservation; for not a hair from the head of any of you shall perish.' ³⁵And having said this, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all; and he broke it and began to eat. ³⁶And all of them were encouraged, and they themselves also took food. ³⁷And all of us in the ship were two hundred and seventy-six persons."

Paul urged them to eat and assured them of their safety. He then reinforced his words by example. Paul broke bread and ate and all followed suit. For the first time, Luke tells us the number of people on board. But why here? Perhaps the count was made in order to distribute the food equitably.

THE BEACHING OF THE SHIP 27:38-41

"And when they had eaten enough, they began to lighten the ship by throwing out the wheat into the sea. ³⁹And when day came, they could not recognize the land; but they did observe a certain bay with a beach, and they resolved to drive the ship onto it if they could. ⁴⁰And casting off the anchors, they left them in the sea while at the same time they were loosening the ropes of the rudders, and hoisting the foresail to the wind, they were heading for the beach. ⁴¹But striking a reef where two seas met, they ran the vessel aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stem began to be broken up by the force of the waves."

The place where *two seas met* is what we would call a sandbar with deep water on both sides. As the boat begins to break apart, it was every man for himself.

THE INTERVENTION OF THE CENTURION 27:42-44

"And the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, that none of them should swim away and escape; ⁴³but the centurion, wanting to bring Paul safely through, kept them from their intention, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land, ⁴⁴and the rest should follow, some on planks, and others on various things from the ship. And thus it happened that they all were brought safely to land."

The Roman law said the soldier who allowed a prisoner to escape was subject to the same punishment the prisoner would have suffered. They therefore determined to kill all the prisoners, which would have included Paul. Julius, however, was apparently a gracious man and intervened lest Paul be killed. Cargo and ship were lost, but God kept his promise precisely—no life was lost.

THE JOURNEY DELAYED 28:1-10

The Arrival Incident 28:1-6

The Welcome 28:1-2

"And when they had been brought safely through, then we found out that the island was called Malta. ²And the natives showed us extraordinary kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all."

Malta was a small island eight miles wide and eighteen miles long. It was known for its prosperity and residential architecture. Named by the Phoenicians, Malta means *a place of refuge*. Luke calls those who met them natives. The Greek word is *barbaros*, a term used for those who did not speak Greek. It is onomatopoeic, expressing the idea that languages other than Greek were blah-blah-blah. Though they may have sounded barbaric in language, they were warm in heart as they welcomed two hundred seventy-six sea soaked survivors by building a fire for them.

The Viper 28:3-6

"But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand. ⁴And when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying to one another, 'Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live.' ⁵However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm. ⁶But they were expecting that he was about to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had waited a long time and had seen nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and began to say that he was a god."

Paul, though a great apostle, rolled up his shirt sleeves and joined in the work. Paul was a practical person on board ship, and he remains so on land.

The people on Malta had, among other gods, the Greek goddess *Dika*, which means *just or righteous*. There is an epitaph written for a shipwrecked sailor who was killed by a snake bite. It reveals a philosophy held by those who lived on Malta. "O, he escaped the storm and the raging of the murderous sea. But as he lay stranded in the Libyan sand, not far from the beach and heavy with sleep, at last, naked and destitute, weary as he was from the terrible shipwreck, the viper struck him dead. What did he struggle against the waves? He did not escape the lot which was destined for him on land."

The interpretation given the event is a good example of pagan theology versus Christian theology. Pagan theology finds its roots in human observation, and what they saw caused them to change what they believed.

Luke, in including the viper incident, shows that Paul is not only heavenly directed but is also heavenly protected. At Lystra Paul had rebuked the people when they treated him as a god (Acts 14:15-18) but not so at Malta. This is probably because they did not attempt to worship him at this place. Human reason never comes to correct spiritual conclusions. They had formerly believed that the viper sting was the pursuit of justice of a guilty man. When they saw Paul was unhurt, they once again changed their theology, concluding that he must be god, a belief as erroneous as the first.

The Ongoing Miracles 28:7-10

"Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the leading man of the island, named Publius, who welcomed us and entertained us courteously three days. ⁸And it came about that the father of Publius was lying in bed afflicted with recurrent fever and dysentery; and Paul went in to see him and after he had prayed, he laid his hands on him and healed him. ⁹And after this had happened, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases were coming to him and getting cured. ¹⁰And they also honored us with many marks of respect; and when we were setting sail, they supplied us with all we needed."

Publius was literally the “first man of the island.” This was an official title that has been found on two Maltese inscriptions, one in Greek and one in Latin.

These healings are the only events that Luke records in addition to the viper incident. When one observes that they stayed on the island for three months, it becomes obvious that Luke was highly selective in writing of the events that took place there.

After two years in prison, the approval of God on the ministry of Paul needed to be reinforced. Since miracle working power was that which validated the call of an apostle, it is natural that miracles would be performed in abundance as Luke shows us.

Reference to *the rest of the people* coming to be healed is understood by many interpreters to be a hyperbole. Maybe not; is it unthinkable that God should enable Paul to heal all those on the island?

THE JOURNEY COMPLETED 28:11-31

The Last Lap 28:11-15

Malta to Syracuse 28:11-12

“And at the end of three months we set sail on an Alexandrian ship which had wintered at the island, and which had the Twin Brothers for its figurehead. ¹²And after we put in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days.”

The three months spoken of were the winter season when navigation was impossible. Navigation could resume when the west winds began to blow in early February.

Ships, like inns, took their names from their figureheads. On the masthead were the words “the dioscuroi,” the sons of Zeus. The two brothers were Castor and Pollux, his twin sons. They were the patrons of navigation and thus favorites of sailors. Their constellation was Gemini, a sign of good fortune in a storm. The sons of Zeus carry the messenger of the true God to Rome!

Syracuse to Rome 28:13-14

“And from there we sailed around and arrived at Rhegium, and a day later a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. ¹⁴There we found some brethren, and were invited to stay with them for seven days; and thus we came to Rome.”

Luke was a God-centered man, and yet he did not feel obliged to engage in pious terminology. Luke said, “A south wind sprang up”; he did not say, “The Lord wondrously blessed with a south wind.” He said, “We found some brethren,” not “The Lord graciously led us to fellow believers.”

Welcome to Rome 28:15-16

"And the brethren, when they heard about us, came from there as far as the Market of Appius and Three Inns to meet us; and when Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage. ¹⁶And when we entered Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him."

Appia was the straightest and most perfectly made of all the Roman roads. Halting stations were built every ten or fifteen miles over the entire length of the Roman road system. The Forum of Appius was forty-three miles from Rome. At each point, believers were waiting to meet Paul who is about to begin a two year ministry in imperial Rome.

The Roman Jews 28:17-31**The First Meeting 28:17-22**

THE APOSTLE PAUL SPEAKS 28:17-20

"And it happened that after three days he called together those who were the leading men of the Jews, and when they had come together, he began saying to them, 'Brethren, though I had done nothing against our people, or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. ¹⁸And when they had examined me, they were willing to release me because there was no ground for putting me to death. ¹⁹But when the Jews objected, I was forced to appeal to Caesar; not that I had any accusation against my nation. ²⁰For this reason therefore, I requested to see you and to speak with you, for I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel.' "

Acts 28:17-22 describes an informal meeting, while Acts 28:23-24 describes a more formal one. Paul is acting in accord with his normal procedure. As soon as possible upon arrival in a new city, he made contact with the Jewish community first. There were synagogues in Rome; but since Paul was chained to a Roman guard, this was not the most convenient way to make contact with them. Paul briefly recalls the course of events that brought him to Rome. He then sets aside two false accusations. First, he denies that he violated the Jewish nation (Acts 28:17). In the words *Brethren, though I*, he uses an emphatic personal pronoun, meaning he is about to make a personal defense. His appeal to Caesar was to establish his innocence, nothing else. Second, he denies that he had violated the Roman Empire (28:18-19). Paul had stood before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa; and each of them ruled favorably toward Paul on this issue.

The true issue is brought forth in verse 20. It was the issue of the Messianic hope of Israel. Paul believed that hope was fulfilled in Jesus; the rest of the Jews did not (23:6, 24:21, 26:6-8, and 28:20). Put briefly, the Jewish view was that Paul had departed from the Jewish hope; the Pauline view was that Jesus had fulfilled the Jewish hope.

THE JEWS OF ROME SPEAK 28:21-22

"And they said to him, 'We have neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren come here and reported or spoken anything bad about you. ²²But we desire to hear from you what your views are; for concerning this sect, it is known to us that it is spoken against everywhere.' "

The Second Meeting 28:23-31

THE PRESENTATION 28:23

"And when they had set a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God, and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening."

Paul makes the basic argument that Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament history and prophecy. His text was the entire Hebrew Testament. For hours Paul argued that its fulfillment was found in the life and teaching of Jesus. Considering the time consumed, this verse is highly condensed and only gives the gist of what Paul said. The debate was doubtless an impassioned one.

THE RESPONSE 28:24

"And some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe."

A few were persuaded by Paul, but the majority refused to believe. The pattern of Jewish rejection played out in Rome as it did in the other cities where Paul preached the gospel. This is the last Jewish rejection recorded in the book of Acts. It is fitting that Paul would introduce the testimony of Isaiah concerning Jewish rejection of the truth.

THE PROPHECY 28:25-29

"And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word, 'The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers,²⁶ saying, "Go to this people and say, 'You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; and you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive;²⁷ for the heart of this people has become dull, and with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I should heal them.' " ²⁸Let it be known to you therefore, that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they also will listen.' ²⁹[And when he had spoken these words, the Jews departed, having a great dispute among themselves.]"

The book of Acts records the expansion of Christianity among the Gentiles, but it also notes repeatedly the rejection of Christianity by the Jews. Here is the last testimony in Acts to this rejection.

The rejection comes to an appropriate conclusion by quoting a key Old Testament passage found in Isaiah 6. As verse 29 shows, the quoting of Isaiah will precipitate the departure of a large number of Jews.

The Jews violently disagreed with Paul on two points. They disagreed with his attempt to prove the stubbornness of the Jews on the basis of the words spoken to Isaiah concerning the Jewish rejection of his message. They also disagreed that Jewish rejection was the occasion for extending the message of salvation to the Gentiles. And so, Paul argues, the entire blame for Israel's estrangement from God may be traced to the stubbornness of the people themselves.

Verse 29 is textually uncertain. It may have been added because of the abrupt transition from verse 28 to verse 30. It does serve as a nice "bridge" between the two verses.

THE MINISTRY IN ROME 28:30-31

"And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters, and was welcoming all who came to him, ³¹preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered."

This ministry of Paul was carried on for two years as he remained under house arrest. What happened to Paul after this? Philippians 1:18-19 indicates he anticipated a release. If this occurred after the two year period, we are looking at A.D. 63. II Timothy 4 speaks of an approaching trial with a tone of resignation. Paul was probably arrested again in A.D. 67 and, according to tradition, beheaded at Rome by Nero.

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