

ACTS

INTRODUCTION

Luke is the author of the book that bears his name and of the book of Acts. Acts was written and released at a time precisely indicated by the approaching end of Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, that being the year 62 or early 63 A.D.

Luke was an eyewitness of much that is recorded in Acts, as indicated by the "we" passages.

Acts is the key book in the study of the New Testament. Acts is the keystone of the arch between the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament. The beginning of the church, the persistence of Jewish persecution, the spread of the gospel outward from Jerusalem, and Gentile take-over of the Christian religion—all these things are recorded in Acts. It is invaluable as the only source of knowledge concerning the terms of entry into God's kingdom, as preached by the apostles of Christ.

Religious error of many kinds and dimensions is founded upon a total disregard of what is taught in The Acts of the Apostles. Acts is a book of conversions and attempted conversions.

The Holy Spirit of promise announced by Peter on Pentecost (2:38ff), was given to all who became Christians, and did not require the laying on of hands to receive it, being automatically given to all who obeyed the gospel and became sons of God. (Galatians 4:6)

Another purpose of Luke included giving an account of Jewish persecution against the church, beginning with their mocking the apostles on Pentecost (2:13), and continuing to the very end of Acts where their final and official hardening was announced. (28:25-28)

This murderous opposition was initiated by the Sadducees (4:2), who threatened the apostles (4:21), imprisoned them (5:18), beat them (5:40), suborned perjury against Stephen (6:13), stoned him (7:58), decided to kill Paul (9:23), constantly harassed him on the mission field (13:45-56), pursued in to

Iconium (14:5), stoned him at Lystra (14:19), and opposed him in Thessalonica, Berea (17:13), and in Corinth (18:2)

They plotted to kill Paul (20:3); forty conspirators swore to murder him (23:12), as did another group later (25:3). They swore false charges against Paul before Felix (24:1), before Festus (25:7); and when Paul was declared innocent by all of his judges, they exerted political pressure to prevent his release. The final act of their opposition was their refusal to appear against Paul in Rome, where they knew they had no chance of getting a conviction.

The crowning act of their madness against the church was recorded in Acts chapter 12, in which is related the design of Herod Agrippa I to murder the apostle because he saw it pleased the Jews, a design providentially averted by an angel's destruction of Herod.

Luke was to outline the giving of the new name by which Christ's followers would be known on earth. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch (11:26). Paul bore this name before King Agrippa II, who said, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian!" (26:28).

At that point, the name "disciples" as applied to Christians disappeared from the New Testament, never being used again afterward.

Another purpose of Luke in Acts was that of describing the fall of the Jewish temple. Jesus had said, shortly before His crucifixion, "Behold your house is being left to you desolate" (Matthew 23:38), prophesying its complete destruction. The total moral corruption of the temple lead inevitably to the destruction of it which Jesus had so emphatically prophesied, is one of the major themes in Acts.

The geographical progression of Christianity is one of Luke's clearly discernible themes. Christ Himself laid out the schedule of evangelization as "Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth" (1:8); and the book of Acts follows this outline exactly; the gospel being preached in Jerusalem (1:1—8:4); in Judaea and Samaria (8:5—11:18), and in the uttermost part of the earth (11:19 to the end of Acts).

Jesus had promised that Peter (and the twelve) would have the keys of the kingdom (Matthew 16:19); and in Acts Peter used the “keys” no less than five times.

- (1) He solved the mystery of the Davidic kingdom, (2:31).
- (2) Announced the terms of entry into the kingdom of God as faith, repentance, and baptism. (Acts 2:38)
- (3) Announced the terms of restoration for a backslider as repentance and prayer. (8:22)
- (4) Opened the door of hope for the Gentiles by commanding the baptism of Cornelius. (10:47)
- (5) Declared the freedom of all Christians from any observance of the Law of Moses. (15:10)

The three missionary tours of Paul are also a major theme. (13:1-14; 28) (15:40 – 18:22), and (18:23-21:28)

The apostolic observance of the Lord’s Supper likewise appears as an important theme, despite the subdued presentation of it.

The ministry of angels upon behalf of Christians is an important recurring theme throughout Acts. An angel released the twelve from prison (5:19); spoke to Phillip (8:26); appeared to Cornelius (10:3); liberated Peter (12:7); executed Herod (12:23); and encouraged Paul (27:23).

Paul’s purpose of gathering a collection for the saints in Jerusalem, which occupies such an important place in the epistles, is not ignored by Luke in Acts. Acts as a history of the growth of Christianity gives the following specific references to it; (2:47); (6:7); (9:31); (11:21); (12:24); (16:5); (19:20); and (28:31).

It is idle to ask, “What is the theme of Acts?” or “What was the purpose of Luke in this work?” His themes and purposes were multiple; and the masterful manner in which the sacred historian has melded these sixteen themes into one, doing it so skillfully that each theme is clearly discernible in many places throughout the book.

OUTLINE OF ACTS

There are many possible outlines for the book of Acts. We will be using the following outline.

1. Preaching Christ in Jerusalem (1:1—8:3)
2. Preaching Christ in Judea and Samaria (8:4—11:18)
3. Preaching Christ to the Uttermost Parts (11:19—28:31)
(This division actually includes the following)
4. The Missionary Journeys of Paul (13:1--21:23)
5. The Period of Paul's Imprisonment (21:24--26:32)
6. The Journey to Rome (27:1—28:31)

CHAPTER 1

THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM

(1:1—8:4), Verse 1

“The first account . . . “ refers to the Gospel of Luke. “Theophilus . . .” This proper name has the meaning of “one who loves God,” but there is no valid reason for understanding it as anything other than the personal name of Luke’s friend to whom he addressed both the Gospel and Acts.

“Concerning all that Jesus . . . “ “All” that Jesus did and taught, has the meaning, that “all” Luke wrote concerned those things. A basic truth evident in all the sacred gospels is that the things written concerning Jesus have recorded only a small fraction of His mighty works and teachings, this having been powerfully stated by John. (21:25)

“Began to do and teach . . . ” When Jesus bowed His head upon the cross and said, “It is finished,” the reference was primarily to the personal ministry of our Lord. The great redemptive act was indeed finished; the Law of Moses was nailed to the cross; Satan’s head was bruised; the Sabbath day was abolished; and the foundation for human justification was forever established.

H. Leo Boles, Commentary on the Acts, p. 17 expressed it: “God and Christ begin, but there is no ending in their working; Jesus began working and teaching

in the Gospel of Luke, and He is still working through the Holy Spirit in the church.”

J. W. McGarvey, Commentary on Acts, p. 1 took a different view of this verse, and was sure that: “It is a mistake to suppose that there is an allusion in this expression to the personal acts and teaching of Christ as a mere beginning of that which He continued to do and teach after His ascension.”

Verse 2

“He was taken up . . .” This statement makes the ascension of Jesus Christ to have been something God did for Jesus, and not something Jesus did Himself.

“By the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles . . .” Here at the very beginning of Acts, Luke brought into view the work of the Holy Spirit which received such extensive emphasis throughout the book. The “orders in view here was given on the day Jesus was taken up, this commandment being in fact the enabling charter for all that the apostles were to do. This is a reference to the 'Great Commission.'”

J. W. McGarvey, Ibid., p. 3 said, “This is the key to the whole narrative before us; in Acts are recorded the counterpart of its terms and the best exposition of its meaning.”

Before the Holy Spirit was given to the apostles, they were not fully capable of proclaiming the gospel of Christ, due to their misunderstanding of the nature of the kingdom; but after Pentecost, they were guided by the Holy Spirit into all truth.

“Through the Holy Spirit . . .” All that Jesus did was “through” the Holy Spirit, for Jesus was in possession of the measureless gift of the Spirit throughout His ministry. (John 3:34)

Verse 3a

“By many convincing proofs . . .” Note: Some versions render this verse as “many infallible proofs” which is not in the Greek text—that meaning is really included in the noun (proofs).

“The period of forty days . . .” The teaching here is that at intervals throughout a period of forty days Jesus made frequent appearances to the apostles. Significantly, Jesus never appeared to any of His enemies. R. E. Walker, *Studies in Acts*, p. 10 said, “The testimony of them that knew Him best would be stronger than that of the mere acquaintances.”

The refusal of the Pharisees to believe, even after Lazarus' resurrection, proved that it would have done no good for Jesus to have appeared to the wicked and self-hardened priests.

Verse 3b

E. H. Plumptre, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 1 said, “This implies, obviously, much unrecorded teaching.” Certain specifics, however, are clearly visible in what is recorded such as: (1) that Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Luke 24:44-47); (2) that all men, including the Gentiles, were to be received into the kingdom through their faith and submission to baptism (Matthew 28:19-20 and Mark 16:15-16); and (3) that Jesus would be with His church perpetually, watching over His followers providentially (Matthew 28:20 and Mark 16:17ff).

Verse 4

“Gathering them together . . .” The Greek text here may be translated “eating with them,” and thus there were possibly many occasions when Jesus ate food with His apostles after He was raised from the dead. (Luke mentioned Jesus' eating with the apostles (24:43) and Peter referred to it in Acts 10:41.)

“Not to leave Jerusalem . . .” Not till after Pentecost and the baptism of the Holy Spirit would the apostles become fully qualified preachers of the gospel. “Wait for what the Father had promised . . .” The apostles were to wait in Jerusalem because the promise of the Father was not yet given, and without it they were without power to accomplish their divine mission.

It was foreordained of God (Isaiah 2:3), that the gospel should begin in Jerusalem; and it is hard to imagine a more significant verse in the whole Bible. Religions which were launched from Boston, Rome, Salt Lake City, of anywhere

else on the face of the earth except “from Jerusalem” cannot be identified with the “word of the Lord”!

Verse 5

The new birth is a dual thing, as Jesus said, being both “of the water” and “of the Spirit.” The apostles had all been baptized with the baptism of John, hence the mention of it here; and the new birth in the Twelve themselves would be an actual reality upon their reception of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. It is a mistake to understand the outpouring of the Spirit upon the Twelve (promised here) apart from their having already submitted to John’s baptism.

“Not many days from now . . .” That is, within ten days intervening between Jesus’ ascension and the pouring out of the Spirit on Pentecost.

A. C. Hervey, *Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 18, Acts, p. 2 quoting Chrysostom wrote regarding the baptism of the Twelve, “They were baptized by John;” but even apart from such ancient testimony, the deduction is mandatory from the fact of the apostles having aided in the administration of John’s baptism (John 4:2). It is impossible to imagine that they were baptizing others with a baptism to which they themselves had not submitted.”

THE ASCENSION

(6-11), Verse 6

Error always dies hard, especially that type of error which is deeply ingrained and fortified by human lusts and desires. An earthly kingdom was never, in the long history of Israel or at any other time, contained in the purpose of God for Israel. Even the kingdom of Saul, David, and Solomon, which God permitted but never approved, was from its inception a rejection of God’s government of the chosen people. (1 Samuel 8:7)

Israel’s desire for the restoration of that kingdom blinded their eyes to the Christ; and here it is evident that even the sacred Twelve themselves were contaminated with the earthly kingdom virus!

J. W. McGarvey, *op. cit.*, p. 5 said, “The question shows unmistakably that Jesus’ kingdom had not yet been inaugurated; for if it had been, it is

inconceivable that these men, who were its chief executive officers on earth, knew nothing of the fact; and it is equally inconceivable that if it had been, Jesus would not have promptly corrected so egregious a blunder on the part of His disciples.”

Verse 7

The kingdom in its present phase would begin very shortly. Jesus immediately warned His apostles that the final phase of the kingdom, including the resurrection and final judgment, would come at a time unknown to any man, not even to Himself in His earthly limitation.

F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 38 called this, “The last flicker of their former burning expectation of an imminent political theocracy with themselves as its chief executives. From, this time forth, they devoted themselves to the proclamation and service of God’s spiritual kingdom.”

Everett F. Harrison, *Wycliffe Bible commentary*, p. 385 said, “This does not mean that God is through with Israel; Romans 11:26 says that all Israel shall be saved.” However, the “Israel” in view here is spiritual Israel, not the hardened secular Israel. There is no New Testament teaching to the effect that secular Israel will accept Jesus Christ; but, on the other hand, it is indicated that they will remain hardened “until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (Romans 11:25), a time that may coincide with the coming of the end of the world.

Verse 8

This promise, addressed directly to the apostles, has been grossly misinterpreted. Frederick Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, p. 160-161 said, “To be baptized in the Spirit is to become Christ’s. The baptism of the Holy Spirit joins men to Christ so that they become Christians. This promise is inclusive and not selective, which is another way of saying that it is gracious and not conditional. There are no conditions in Acts 1:8.”

God’s Spirit was never given to any man to make him a son, but it may be received only by them that are sons in consequence of their being so. To make the sending of God’s Spirit unconditional, while at the same time understanding

it as that which makes a man a Christian, is to remove all responsibility from men regarding their salvation. The Scriptures do not teach this.

“Jerusalem . . . all Judaea and Samaria . . . and the uttermost parts of the earth . . .” Everett F. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 385 noted, “This verse is a table of contents of the Book of Acts.” This, in part, is the outline used in this material. Jerusalem (Acts 1:1--8:4), Judaea and Samaria (8:5-11:18), and the uttermost part of the earth (11:19 to the end of Acts).

Orin Root, *Acts* p. 2 noted, “There was good reason for selecting the Holy City for the birthplace of the church, also for choosing the date of one of the great Jewish festivals for the time. On such occasions, myriads of Jews flocked there as they made their holy pilgrimages to worship God. the gospel could then be proclaimed to a waiting multitude of the faithful, who in turn would carry the glad tidings back to their respective homelands.”

The amazing love of Christ is also seen as another reason. Not even the bitterest enemies who made up the ruling class in Jerusalem were to be denied their right to hear the gospel, either receiving it or rejecting it. Only the Lord Jesus had such love as this.

Verse 9

There had been at least ten appearances of Jesus to His disciples after His resurrection, and possibly many, many more: but this event was, in a sense final. F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 40 wrote, “What happened on the fortieth day was that this series of visitations came to an end, with a scene which impressed on the disciples their Master’s heavenly glory.”

“A cloud received Him . . .” There was such a cloud at the transfiguration (Matthew 17:5); Jesus spoke of His coming “in the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62) and in the Old Testament, a cloud was the visible token to Israel that the glory of God dwelt in the tent of meeting. (Exodus 40:34)

Verse 10

“Heaven” as used here merely means that they were looking upward, not that they actually saw Jesus entering into the heaven of heavens which is the place of God’s throne.

F. F. Bruce, op. cit., p. 40 observed, “We need not be alarmed by suggestions that the ascension story is bound up with a pre-Copernican conception of the universe, and that the former is therefore as obsolete as the latter. Anyone appearing to leave earth’s surface must appear to spectators to be ascending.”

“Two men . . . in white . . .” These were angels, so identified from their dazzling apparel, as frequently spoken of in the Scriptures. (Matthew 28:3; John 20:12)

Verse 11

The message of the angels to the heavenward-gazing apostles has the spiritual effect of challenging every believer to be busily engaged in the service of the Lord, rather than wasting time by gazing into those things which are beyond human knowledge of them.

“Will come in just the same way . . .” This is a heavenly pledge that the Second Coming will be literal and physical as was Jesus’ departure.

WAITING IN JERUSALEM

(12-14), Verse 12

The New Bible Dictionary, p. 1324 says that, “Bethany, on the eastern slope of Olivet, was fifteen furlongs from Jerusalem (John 11:18); and since the distance from the site of the ascension to Jerusalem was a Sabbath’s day’s journey (approximately 3000 feet), the site would have to be about two-thirds of the distance from Bethany to Jerusalem (fifteen furlongs being about 9100 feet). “Over against Bethany” means “in the direction of” that village.”

Verse 13

“The upper chamber . . .” may not be certainly identified, despite insistent tradition to the effect that it was the place where the Last Supper was held, and that it was in the home of Mary, sister of Barnabas and mother of John Mark.

The list of the Twelve is given four times in the New Testament, in Matthew 10, Mark 3, Luke 6, and here. Peter, Philip, and James are recorded first in three groups of four each, of course, the name of Judas being deleted here. The mention of the apostles by name stresses that the Twelve (Luke would

immediately record the replacement of Judas by Matthias) were on hand in Jerusalem, as Jesus commanded, waiting for the promise of the Father.

“Simon the Zealot . . .” There is no reason for writing “Zealot” with a capital “Z” and then identifying Simon as a member of some revolutionary party which bore that name in 66 A. D. F. B. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 43-44 said, “Acts was written before that name was used; and, besides that, the name zealot can be used as a non-technical common noun.”

In both Mark 3:19 and Matthew 10:4, this apostle is called “The Cananaean,” and as Bruce explained, “Cananaean” represents the Hebrew and Aramaic words for Zealot, which is of Greek origin. (*Ibid*, p. 43) Thus, Simon’s native title, “Cananaean,” translates “Zealot” in Greek, the language in which Luke was writing; and being, himself, a Gentile, Luke did not bother to use the old Aramaic form as did Matthew and Mark.

Verse 14

As H. Leo Boles, *op. cit.*, p. 26 noted, “There are four separately mentioned classes of persons,” who made up this company. They were: (1) the apostles, (2) Mary the mother of Jesus and certain other devout women, (3) the brothers of Jesus, and (4) certain other disciples. (Verse 15) “To prayer . . . “ No better way of waiting God’s promise could be imagined than that followed here.

“Mary the mother of Jesus . . .” This is the last mention of Mary in the New Testament; and from the fact of her being here with the apostles, it is evident that John honored the Lord’s commission to receive her into his home and care for her. (John 19:27)

“And with His brothers . . .” The brothers of Jesus were James, and Joseph, and Simon, and Judas (Matthew 13:55); and from the fact of their being mentioned apart from the apostles, it is clear that those apostles bearing some of these same names were not brothers of the Lord.

These brothers were the literal half-brothers of our Lord, being sons of Mary born after the birth of Jesus.

CHOOSING A SUCCESSOR TO JUDAS

(15-26)

One of the most significant passages in the New Testament is this, wherein a successor to an apostle was chosen, the same being the only example of any such thing in the whole New Testament.

Verse 15

Don De Welt, *Acts Made Actual*, p. 32, was obviously correct in his observation that: “The apostles knew they were going to be baptized with the Holy Spirit according to promise and prophecy and that there should be Twelve in the group. Because of this Peter directed the selection of one to fill the vacancy left by the betrayal of Judas. This truth lends still more force to the thought that only the Twelve were baptized in the Holy Spirit.”

Verse 16

Throughout the word of God, the prophets and writers of the Old Testament are represented, not as originating the words they delivered, but as receiving them from the Lord by means of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 17

This verse makes two statements: (1) that Judas was numbered with the Twelve, and (2) that he “received” his portion of the apostolical ministry. This means that Judas, at first, was a genuine apostle, he (not less than the others) being commissioned to cast out demons and to heal all manner of diseases. (Matthew 10:1) This refutes the allegation that Judas was a devil from the beginning.

Verses 18-19

These verses, were not spoken by Peter, but by Luke, as proved by “their language” in verse 19.

Judas hanged himself, as Matthew related; but his body also fell, as in Luke. We do not know whether the fall took place as a result of Judas’ bungling efforts at suicide, or if his body hung till it fell of natural causes. Tradition says that he fell while in the process of hanging himself.

B. W. Johnson, *New Testament with Explanatory Notes*, p. 418 says, “He probably hanged himself on a tree projecting over the precipices of the Valley of Hinnom, and afterward, on account of the rope or limb breaking, fell headlong with such force as to burst his body open on the jagged rocks. This is the traditional account of his death.”

It is exactly true that Judas “obtained” the field. His money bought it. The priests, however, actually did the purchasing, hence the statement that “they” bought the field.

Two reasons for the name of the field, Akeldema, the reason assigned for this name in Matthew being the fact that the money that bought it was “the price of blood,” and the reason in Acts appearing to be derived from the bloody death of Judas. Matthew’s mention of one reason does not deny the other, nor does Luke’s mention of the other deny the one.

The apparent reason for the parenthesis was to show the desolation of Judas’ estate, that is, “The Field of Blood.” Peter’s speech, which Luke immediately resumed, quoted prophecy with reference to that very desolation.

Verse 20

Peter’s reason for applying these words to Judas appears to be this: since the enemies of David, who were only a type of Christ, who were thus denounced, then certainly an enemy and betrayer of the greater Son of David would be the proper object of the same denunciation.

Verses 21-22

If not even a successor to Judas could be named an apostle except from among those who were constant companions of Jesus from John’s baptism till the resurrection of Christ, how is it possible that no person in subsequent ages should be hailed as an apostle?

These two verses shed light upon two of the most important subjects in the New Testament: (1) the qualifications of an apostle, and (2) the purpose of an apostle that of witnessing the resurrection of Christ.

It should be noted that death did not remove Judas from his office; it was his betrayal of Jesus that removed him. When James was executed by Herod (12:2), no successor was chosen. Christ had promised the Twelve they would reign concurrently with Christ, “sitting upon twelve thrones and judging the twelve tribes of (spiritual Israel)” (Matthew 19:28) Therefore, all of the Twelve except Judas are still in office, all thought of a successor to any of them being absolutely an error.

“Went in and went out . . .” This is an idiom. E. H. Plumptre, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 5 said, “It is a familiar Hebrew phrase for the whole of a man’s life and conduct.”

“Witness with us of His resurrection . . .” The prime function of an apostle was that of a witness of Christ’s resurrection; and, in the history of the world, there was never any such thing as a person not a witness becoming a successor to a witness. Also, here is identified the principal doctrine of Christianity, namely, the resurrection of our Lord.

A. C. Hervey, the *Pulpit Commentary*, Acts, p. 6 wrote, “The resurrection of Christ from the dead thus appears to be a cardinal doctrine of the gospel. The whole truth of Christ’s mission, was the acceptance of His sacrifice, the consequent forgiveness of sins, and all man’s hopes of eternal life, turn upon it.”

Verse 23

“They put forward . . .” Who did the putting forward? Is it to be supposed that the 120 disciples mentioned a little do this? There is no evidence whatever that such a group had been disciples from the beginning of John’s baptism; and thus it is not reasonable to suppose that anyone participated in the selection of Justus and Matthias except the apostles. There is a strong inference in this passage that only two qualified men could be found, other than the apostles themselves. It appears that those two were equally qualified, hence the decision through casting lots.

Verse 24

“Thou, Lord . . .” This could either be to the Father or to the Lord Jesus. F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 51 said, “As the verb used in “Thou hast chosen” (end of verse

24) is the same as he used in “He had chosen” (end of verse 2), it is reasonable to conclude that Jesus is the subject here as in the former place.”

Verse 25

“From which Judas fell away . . . “ The Greek word *parabaino*, which means “transgression,” is in the Greek text, and it should most certainly appear in the English, thus making it crystal clear that sin resulted in the fall of Judas from a spiritual condition and from an office, both of which he once possessed.

“His own place . . .” A. C. Hervey, *op. cit.*, p. 6 called this “an awful phrase, showing that every man has the place in eternity which he has made for himself in time.”

The New Testament writer’s mention of the fate of Judas is noteworthy. In their sorrow their mention of him was sorrowful. None of them embellished the traitor’s deed in any manner. Even here, it is not stated what the fate of Judas was, the same merely inferred.

F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 51 wrote, “The circumstance of his death gave them little ground for hope in this regard, but they would not take it upon themselves to say definitely what ‘his own place’ was to which he went.”

“Matthias . . .” Eusebius declared that this man was one of the seventy mentioned in Luke 10:1, which is probable, but not proved. Some have suggested that the apostles erred in choosing a successor to Judas and should have waited for the Lord’s call of the apostle Paul to fill the vacancy, but such an opinion cannot be justified at all. Paul did possess the qualifications. He was a special apostle to the Gentiles, himself confessing that he was “not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God (1 Corinthians 15:9); and, besides that Paul mentioned “the twelve” as not including himself. (1 Corinthians 15:5)

CHAPTER 2

This fantastic chapter records the establishment of the church of Jesus Christ upon this earth, the same being the long-promised kingdom of God, and the

fulfillment of a vast body of Old Testament prophecy. This is not merely the best account of the beginning of this current dispensation of the grace of God, it is the only account, the keystone that ties together the Old Testament and the New Testament; and, regarding such question as how the church began, and of how one becomes a member of it, and of the first emergence of God's new creation in Christ. This chapter provides a record of what is known, as contrasted with what is merely guessed about these vital considerations.

This account is brief, so condensed, and concerning which things men will always desire to know more about than what is revealed. However, concerning things which are within the perimeter of what men need to know, this chapter blazes with eternal light.

PENTECOST

Verse 1

“Pentecost . . .” This is one of the three principal feasts of the Jews, the others being Passover and Tabernacles. This feast was known by several names: “First Fruits,” “Harvest Festival,” “Feast of Weeks (Leviticus 23:15 f) , and “Pentecost,” as here.

The last two of these names derived from the time it was held, which was fifty days after the first ordinary Sabbath after the beginning of Passover, “Pentecost” meaning “fiftieth.”

Since fifty days were exactly seven weeks, counting the first and last Sundays inclusively, this led to the name “Feast of Weeks.” The historical church devised another name which came about thus: ISBE, p. 2319 says, “The habit of dressing in white and seeking baptism on Pentecost gave it the name “Whitsunday,” by which it is popularly known all over the world.”

The Passover week, from which Pentecost was reckoned, usually had two Sabbaths: (1) the first full day of the feast, called a “high” Sabbath (John 19:31), and (2) the ordinary Sabbath, the seventh day of the ordinary week.

The year our Lord suffered (A.D. 30), the high Sabbath fell on Friday, both our Lord and the robbers being crucified on Thursday the preceding day; and, to prevent the bodies remaining upon the cross on that high Sabbath, the

Pharisees requested Pilate to break their legs. There were back-to-back Sabbaths during the Passover at which Jesus died, as attested by the Greek text of Matthew 28:1.

It will be seen at once that reckoning Pentecost from Friday would give a Saturday for Pentecost (as sabbatarians have insisted); whereas, reckoning from the ordinary Sabbath would give a Sunday. The Sadducees and Karaite Jews counted from the Sabbath ordinary; the Pharisees counted from the high Sabbath. Thus, depending upon which method of calculating was used, Pentecost fell upon either a Saturday or a Sunday; but there is no way that the Christians could have been persuaded to accept the Pharisees' method of counting it, neither the judgment of the Pharisees or Sadducees having any weight at all with the followers of Christ.

The Karaite Jews, however, accepted the Scriptures literally, insisting that Pentecost be reckoned from the Sabbath ordinary of Passover week; and it is certain that Jesus' followers would have done the same thing.

Albert Barnes, Notes on the NT, Acts, p. 26 declared; "The Caraites (alternate spelling of Karaite) Jews, or those who insisted on a literal interpretation of the Scriptures, maintaining that by "the Sabbath" here was meant the usual Sabbath, the seventh day of the week."

The verse before us carries a strong inference that the Pentecost observed by the followers of Jesus that year did not coincide with the Jewish observance. "Day of Pentecost had come . . ." These words indicate that the Christian Pentecost did not coincide with the Jewish, just as Christ's last meal with the disciples was considered not to have coincided with the Jewish Passover.

In many areas, Christian tradition may not be considered as conclusive; but in this matter of what day of the week was Pentecost, the unbroken, unchallenged tradition of more than nineteen centuries, plus the fact that the first day of the week is stressed throughout the New Testament as the fixed day of Christian assemblies, makes it certain that Pentecost fell on a Sunday. Why would the church have clung to their assemblies upon the first day of the week, if indeed the very beginning of the church had not been upon a Sunday?"

F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, p. 53 said; “Christian tradition is therefore right in fixing the anniversary of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon a Sunday.” It should also be noted that the complicated nature of the question in view here is a key factor in the popular and erroneous opinion that Christ was crucified on Friday.

ISBE, p. 2318 says: “According to Matthew, and Mark, and Luke, the Passover that year fell on Thursday the 14th of Nisan, hence Pentecost fell on Saturday.”

In view of the above, many calculators made the crucifixion to be on Friday with a view to fixing Pentecost on Sunday; but the exegesis here demonstrates that it is not necessary at all to do this. It is true, of course, that the Passover fell on Thursday (after sundown), after Jesus was crucified; and the next day (Friday) was a high Sabbath from which the Pharisees would have calculated Pentecost, making it fall on a Saturday. But in their departures from the word of the Lord, the Pharisees were wrong in this, as they were wrong in so many other things. It is very significant, however, that it was the Sadducees, not the Pharisees, who were in charge of the Jewish religious affairs during that crucial time; and they reckoned Pentecost from Sunday after the Sabbath ordinary.

F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 53 explained, “This was the reckoning of the Sadducean party in the first century A.D. In the phrase ‘the day after the Sabbath,’ (Leviticus 23:15), they interpreted the Sabbath as the weekly Sabbath. While the Temple stood, their interpretation would be normative for the public celebration of the festival.”

It seems strongly indicated that Bruce is correct and that the Jewish and Christian Pentecost coincided, the immense throngs of people mentioned in this chapter apparently proving this.

“They were all together . . .” Who were the “they”? The reference is to the Twelve. J. W. McGarvey, *Acts of Apostles*, p. 21 wrote; “The persons thus assembled together and filled with the Holy Spirit were not, as many have supposed, the one hundred and twenty disciples mentioned in a parenthesis in the preceding chapter, but the twelve apostles. This is made certain, by the grammatical connection between the first verse of this chapter and the last of the preceding.”

“In one place . . .” Where was this? It appears most likely that some large area of the temple compound was the place, due to the large numbers of people involved. All that is certain is that it was in Jerusalem.

In later Jerusalem, Pentecost was celebrated as the anniversary of the giving of the Law at Sinai (based upon a deduction from Exodus 19:1); and the occasions do have the great factors in common, of the Law having promulgated at Sinai, and the proclamation of the gospel having begun at Pentecost in Jerusalem. The typical nature of the first event is further seen in the death of three thousand souls through disobedience the day the Law came in and in the contrast of three thousand souls having been saved through obedience at Pentecost.

John Wesley, NT Commentary, *in loco*, has the following comment, “At the Pentecost of Sinai in the Old testament, and the Pentecost of Jerusalem in the New Testament, were the two grand manifestations of God, the legal and the evangelical; the one from the mountain and the other from heaven; the terrible one and the merciful one.”

The very weightiest reasons appear for God’s choice of this day for the beginning of the church: (1) As Jesus was crucified at a great Jewish festival, it was appropriate that He should have been glorified at another; (2) Pentecost was the next after the Passover; (3) it was the anniversary of the giving of the Law; (4) the first fruits were offered on Pentecost, and it was proper that the first fruits of the gospel should come unto God on that occasion; (5) millions of people were in Jerusalem for that occasion; and (6) most importantly of all, perhaps, by its falling upon the first day of the week, it coincided in that particular with the resurrection of Christ, and was thus of major importance in certifying Sunday as the day of the Christian assemblies.

Verses 2-4

The spectacular events here are suggestive of the wonders that attended the giving of the Law (Exodus 19:16f), such as the loud trumpet, the smoking mountain, the terrible earthquake, the thick cloud, and God descending upon Sinai in fire.

“Wind . . . fire . . .” There was no wind, but the sound of a mighty wind; and no fire, but tongues resembling fire at Pentecost. Despite this, wind and fire are both typical and suggestive of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is typified by the wind in that: (1) it is gentle; (2) it is powerful; (3) it is invisible; (John 3:8) (4) it is the “breath” of life itself.

Fire typifies the Holy Spirit in that: (1) it gives light; (2) it provides warmth; (3) it purifies; and (4) it is an emblem of God Himself (Hebrews 12:29, and in this latter quality standing for the judgment of God against wickedness.

That such elemental forces of nature were manifested both at Sinai and at Pentecost is evidence, according to John Peter Lange, Commentary on Acts, p. 31, that the “kingdom of power and of grace is governed by one God.” It is also proof that the God of nature and the God of religious faith are one and the same. Although the tongues so strongly resembled fire, this may not be called a baptism of fire. Everett F. Harrison, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, p. 387 wrote; “For the context in the gospel (Matthew 3:11 f) suggests that the baptism of fire is the judgment of those who reject the Messiah, the burning of the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

“All filled with the Holy Spirit . . .” G. R. Beasley Murray, Baptism in the New Testament, p. 105, gave expression to a common misconception regarding this outpouring of God’s Spirit on the Twelve. He said: “At Pentecost the Spirit came upon the disciples with no other condition than that of prayer; they are not baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, either prior to or after the event.”

None of those persons who had been baptized of John’s baptism had any need to be baptized again; and it is a dogmatic certainty that the Twelve had been baptized by John’s baptism (John 4:1-2), because there is no way to believe that the apostles would have been baptizing others with a baptism to which they themselves had not submitted.

If they had rejected John’s baptism for themselves, it would have been “rejecting the counsel of God” (Luke 7:30); and, had they done that, Jesus would never have named them apostles of the new covenant.

On this Pentecost, there were two measures of the Holy Spirit given: (1) the miraculous outpouring previously promised the Twelve, and (2) the gift ordinary which is received by every Christian. The three thousand who were baptized received the second of these following their baptism.

There is utterly no basis for supposing that they too were given that apostolical measure of the Spirit which would have enabled them to raise the dead, speak with inspiration, and be guided “into all truth,” in the manner of the apostles.

The new birth has two elements in it, requiring that all who experience it be born “of the water” and “of the Spirit.” All who received God’s Spirit that day, in whatever measure, were “born of water,” in that they were baptized (either in John’s baptism or that commanded on Pentecost, and also “born of the Spirit,” that is, they received the gift of the Holy Spirit, whether in apostolical measure or in the measure called “the earnest of our inheritance.” (Ephesians 1:13)

“Began to speak with other tongues . . .” Despite the insistence of some that this has reference to ecstatic utterances like those of so-called “tongues” today, such a view is refuted, absolutely, by that fact that men of many nations understood every word in their native languages. Nothing like this was ever seen, either before or after the astounding event before us. John Peter Lange said, “The confusion of tongues occasioned the dispersion of men (Genesis chapter 11); the gift of tongues reunited them as one people.”

The event at Babel, referred to by Lange, was a direct intervention of God in human history; and the same thing, with opposite purpose, is apparent here. The action at Babel was not repeated, nor was this. Everett F. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 388 said, “This baptism of the Spirit was never repeated. It was later extended to believers in Samaria (Acts 8), to the Gentiles. (Acts 10-11) The filling of the Spirit was often repeated, but not the baptism with the Spirit.”

John Wesley, *op. cit.*, *in loco*, noted that, “(They) spoke languages of which they had been before entirely ignorant. They did not speak now and then a word of another tongue, or stammer out some broken sentences, but spoke each language as readily, properly, and elegantly as if it had been their mother tongue.”

If Wesley's view is correct, and the conviction here is that it is, then it would be logical to understand each one of the Twelve speaking in different areas of the great temple concourse, in such instances speaking in the language of his hearers. There is no way to understand this as a group of twelve men standing closely together and all speaking at once.

H. Leo Boles, *Acts of Apostles*, p. 33 comments on the "tongues" saying, "They were not uttering unintelligible sounds, nor using a mere jargon of syllables with no meaning; their sentences were clear and their words distinct, so that every man heard them speaking in his own language."

This phenomenon was doubtless the "baptism of the Holy Spirit." Don De Welt, *op. cit.*, p. 36 stated that, "We can know as a dogmatic certainty that verse 4 of the second chapter is the literal fulfillment of verse 5 of the first chapter. Jesus had promised (the apostles) the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and here is the fulfillment of His promise.

Verses 5-6

"Heard them speaking in his own language.." Some have understood the miracle to have been in the hearers. It is certain, however, that the miracle was not in the hearers, but in the speakers. If the miracle is understood as being in the hearers, there would have been no need for a plurality of speakers; yet it is clear that all the apostles were speakers; the people "heard them speaking." Thus the wonder was not in the hearers, but in the speakers. After all, it was they who had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 7

Thus, there were twelve speakers, the same being the holy apostles who were miraculously empowered to speak the languages represented by the nationalities Luke at once listed.

Verses 8-13

This list of geographical names shows the diversity of the people to whom the apostles spoke, the provinces and locations mentioned lying in all directions from Jerusalem and representing a cross-section of the languages spoken in the entire Roman Empire. It is a mistake to suppose all of these languages spoken "at once" and by a single speaker. Such a supposition would embellish this wonder far beyond the test. W. R. Walker, *Studies in Acts*, p. 17 said, "It is

probable that each of the eleven addressed the multitude in a different language. People would naturally gather around the man using their native language. We may thus imagine eleven congregations assembled within the same large area, all listening to the same sermon, in substance at least, but each in his own language.”

Orin Root, Commentary on Acts, p. 10, also said, “It is not necessary to assume that each visitor heard the sermon of Peter in his own tongue; but, in the beginning of the morning’s meeting, the various languages were spoken by the apostles.”

The wonder of some and the mockery of others sprang from the sensational event of the Twelve apostles preaching all at one time to twelve assemblies at various places in the large temple enclosure. The power and eloquence of men who but a short while previously had been fishermen in Galilee was an astounding thing; and the scoffers could think of no better explanation than to charge them with drunkenness, a charge as unreasonable as it was malicious.

Verses 14-16

Peter standing up with the eleven . . .” In 2:26, Luke said that Matthias was the twelfth man. In the same way, Peter’s standing up “with the eleven,” as here, means that Peter was the twelfth man. Thus, the Twelve participated in the events of this day.

The sensational speeches made by all of the Twelve earlier were ended at this point. The Twelve came together, and Peter, speaking upon behalf of all of them; delivered the inspired sermon which is the feature of this chapter. All were the object of Peter’s sermon, but he addressed, particularly and primarily, “men of Judaea.”

Peter’s taking the lead here was within full harmony with the Lord’s promise that he should have “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 16:19); and, accordingly, Peter flung wide the gates of the kingdom, preaching the first sermon of the gospel age.

PETER'S SERMON ON PENTECOST

It was the birthday of the New Institution, the official emergence of the kingdom of God among men. Regarding the speaker, the rugged fisherman of Galilee, the bold outdoorsman with the ready tongue and fiery disposition, the man who shortly before had denied Christ whom he was then to proclaim, the natural leader of the Twelve, and the type of man who could command the respect of all, that man was the speaker, and no more effective a person for such a task could be imagined.

The subject matter was human salvation and the procurement of it in Jesus Christ the risen Lord. Where was ever a nobler theme? And the results—three thousand souls believed in the Lord, repented of their sins and were baptized into Christ in a single day! Let men study this speech, and like those who first heard it, they will be amazed and marvel.

Concerning this speech, J. W. McGarvey, *op. cit.*, p. 30 said, "Never did mortal lips announce in so brief a space so many facts of import to the hearers. We might challenge the world to find a parallel to it in the speeches of her orators, or the songs of her poets. There is not such a thunderbolt in all the burdens of the prophets of Israel, or among the voices which thunder in the apocalypse."

The postulations of critics who would if they could, erode the authority of this sermon through allegations that Luke, rather than Peter, composed it, are completely frustrated by this evident marks of its genuineness that distinguish every line of it.

J. R. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, p. 821 said, "The genuineness of this speech is vouched for by the simplicity of its theology, and by its resemblances to 1st Peter (e.g. "foreknowledge," 1 Peter 1:2; "to call upon God," 1:17; "rejoicing," 1:6, 8, 4:13; "the right hand of God," 3:22; "exalt," 5:6; "the house" (Israel), 2:5, 4:17 etc.)"

"These men are not drunk . . ." This malicious comment by the mockers deserved little attention, and little it received by Peter. He merely pointed out that the time of day alone was grounds for rejecting such a slander. On a festival like Pentecost, no Jew ever ate or drank anything till after 9:00 A. M.

“This is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel . . . “ Not Joel, but God was the speaker in that prophet’s writings. “This is what . . . “ identifies the events initiated at Pentecost as fulfilling the prophecy about to be quoted from Joel.

Verse 17

“In the last days . . .” This refers to the Christian dispensation then beginning. The same thought occurs often in the New Testament. Note such passages as Hebrews 1:2, 1 Peter 1:20, and 1 John 2:18. The day of Pentecost, therefore, ushered in the “last days”; but the meaning is compound.

- (1) Those were the last days in the sense of this being the final dispensation of God’s grace to men, the same thought appearing in Mark 12:6.
- (2) Those were the last days in the sense that Israel’s day of grace was running short. Their long and repeated rebellions against God were soon to culminate and become final in their rejection of Christ.
- (3) Those were the last days in the sense that Jerusalem, the temple, and the Jewish state would be utterly destroyed before that generation died (in 70 A.D.).
- (4) Those were the last days in the sense that the prophecies of Jeremiah (31:31-35) and others of a new covenant were fulfilled in the preaching of the gospel.

It is a gross error to suppose that the apostles all thought that the end of the world was at hand. Jesus had plainly told them that some of them were to be killed before Jerusalem fell, and that even the fall of the Holy city was but a type of “the end” that would come long afterward.

Peter here quotes from Joel 2:28ff. “My Spirit upon all flesh . . .” The baptism of the Twelve in the Holy Spirit was the enabling act that would propagate the gospel throughout all times and nations, and it was for the benefit of “all flesh” that this endowment of the apostles was given. Don De Welt, *op. cit.*, p.42 expressed it, “The pouring forth of the Spirit upon all flesh was potentially accomplished upon the day of Pentecost.”

The other things mentioned here, such as sons and daughters prophesying, young men seeing visions, and old men dreaming dreams etc., refer to the gifts of miracles which, through the imposition of the apostles' hands, would bless and encourage the church during the apostolic period. Again from De Welt, *Ibid*, these things can be “understood as the spiritual gifts imparted by the apostles.”

Verse 18

The mention of daughters, handmaidens, and servants show that in Jesus “there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female” (Galatians 3:28).

“They shall prophesy . . .” The tremendous weight of prophecy is not fully appreciated in these times, because men simply do not know how amazingly the apostles of Christ foretold future events.

William Barclay, *Turning to God*, p. 43, relates how the ancient writer Tatian was led to accept the scriptures, quoting him as follows, “I was led to put faith in these by the unpretending cast of their language, the inartificial character of the writers, the foreknowledge displayed of future events, the excellent quality of the precepts, and the declaration of the government of the universe in one Being.”

Verses 19-20

“Wonders in the sky above and signs on the earth beneath . . .” Several of the most spectacular wonders ever seen on earth had occurred right there in Jerusalem the day Jesus was crucified only fifty-three days before Peter thus spoke. The very sun’s light failed; and, as it was the full moon, the satellite appeared as blood. Pontius Pilate wrote to the Emperor Tiberius, Tertullian, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, *Pilate to Tiberius*, Vol. III, p. 463, that “The moon, being like blood, did not shine the whole night, and yet she happened to be at the full.”

Thus the sun and the moon were “wonders in heaven;” and the earthquake, the rending of the veil of the temple, and the resurrection of many of the dead, were signs on the earth beneath.

Certain commentators, such as Everett F. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 389 refer these verses to, “The day of Christ’s coming in glory,” apparently overlooking the most spectacular fulfillment of them a little over seven weeks prior to Peter’s message. Despite this, it is not wrong to see in these words a prophecy of the final day also. F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 68 pointed out, “The last days” began with Christ’s first advent and will end with the second advent. They are the days during which the age to come overlaps the present age; hence the assurance with which Peter could quote the words of Joel and declare, “This is that.”

The “blood and fire and vapor of smoke . . .” were spectacularly associated with every great Jewish feast, such as Passover and Pentecost. It is difficult for any modern to envision the sacrifice of a quarter of a million lambs and all of the blood and “vapor of smoke” that inevitably accompanied such an event.

The awful events prophesied by Joel and here announced by Peter as fulfilled (that is, beginning to be fulfilled) were omens of fearful judgments about to fall upon the chosen people; but in concert with this, Peter extended the hope of grace and forgiveness, basing his whole sermon on the climatic final sentence concluding the passage of Joel.

Verse 21

This verse was the text of Peter’s address, making it clear that his sermon was primarily concerned with human salvation and the means of its procurement by men. F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 68 wrote, “In the midst of these alarming events and wonders and terrible phenomena that foretold awful judgments, opportunity would be given to all who would “call upon the name of the Lord” to be saved.”

The impending judgment against Israel would be the total destruction of the Holy City; but all of the Jews who became Christians were spared in that disaster; and as it was a type of the final judgment and overthrow of the world itself, Peter’s message applied not merely to Israel who first heard it to all men, as stated in verse 39.

“Calls on the name . . .” The word thus translated denotes far more than merely pronouncing the Lord’s name. W. E. Vine, *Dictionary of New Testament*

Words, p. 163 says, “It is used of being declared to be a dedicated person, as to the Lord, Acts 15:17 . . . to invoke, to call upon for one’s self (that is on one’s behalf) . . . and to call upon by way of adoration, making use of the Name of the Lord, Acts 2:21.”

Verse 22

It is significant, as J. W. McGarvey, *op. cit.*, p. 29, taught that, “By the three terms, works . . . wonders . . . signs, Peter does not mean three classes of actions; but he uses the three terms to describe the same phenomena.” All of Christ’s deeds were “mighty works,” for only the power of God in Himself could have done them; they were “wonders,” because all who beheld them marveled; and they were “signs” in that, properly viewed, they attested the oneness of Jesus with the Father in heaven. Thus in a single sentence Peter summarized the countless miracles of the four-year ministry of our Lord.

Verses 23-24

In these verses and the one preceding them, there are four statements, two of which require no proof, the latter being: (1) that God approved Jesus Christ among them by mighty deeds and (2) that they had by the hands of lawless men crucified Him.

“Godless men . . .” McGarvey thought this refers to the Romans, that is, men without the law; and, although true that the Romans were so used by the leaders of Israel in crucifying Christ, we believe that much more is intended. W. E. Vine, *op. cit.*, p. 317 pointed out the word here is the same as that describing the man of sin (2 Thessalonians 2:4), where, “The thought is not simply that of doing what is unlawful, but of flagrant defiance of the known will of God.”

The “lawless men,” therefore, were not merely the Romans, but the religious leaders of Israel who violated every conceivable kind of law in their fruitless determination to accomplish the death of Jesus. How great was the courage of Peter to charge such men publicly, as he did here, and at a time so soon following their dastardly crime.

The other two of the four statements required proof, these being: (3) that it was included in the purpose and foreknowledge of God that Jesus should so suffer, and (4) that God had raised Him from the dead.

Peter at once presented formal, dogmatic and conclusive proof of both of these. That it was God's purpose and with His permission that Jesus suffered; He proved from the Old Testament (verses 25-28) and that God had indeed raised Jesus from the dead; He would prove by appealing to the witnesses of it, as well as by pointing out the clear prophecy of it.

“It was impossible for Him to be held in its power . . . “ The master thesis of the Bible is that God runs a just universe; and if Jesus had remained in the grave, that would have been the end of any such proposition. That is why it was impossible for death to have triumphed over Jesus by retaining His body in the grave.

Verses 25-28

These words are from Psalm 16:8ff. In this Psalm, David spoke in the first person, as if the glorious promises concerned himself; but actually they regarded great David's greater Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, there having been no fulfillment of these words in the instance of King David himself.

It is absolutely certain that this passage from the Old Testament prophesies a resurrection of someone, for it is only by a resurrection that one could descend into the grave (Hades) and not see corruption. The inspired Peter correctly applied it to the resurrection of Christ, an event the Lord had repeatedly, at least four different times, prophesied and elaborated for the Twelve. The proof absolute that this Psalm cannot refer to David was present for all to see right there in Jerusalem in the tomb of David which still enshrined his dust.

Verses 29-31

Peter here affirmed that not only was David fully aware that the promise in his Psalm was not to be fulfilled in himself, but that he also foresaw the resurrection of the Holy One. The certainty of this lies in the words Holy One, there having been utterly no way David would ever have referred to himself in those words. The memory of Uriah and Bathsheba would never have allowed it.

Implicit in Peter's works is also the fact of David's realization that his throne was to be occupied by that same Holy One, even Christ, who true enough would be the "fruit of" David's body, but in only one dimension, that of the flesh.

"Resurrection of the Christ . . ." The significance of "the Christ" should not be overlooked. Jesus was not a Christ, or a Messiah. Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Christ of God! As Alexander Campbell, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 15 observed, "To maintain this was the main drift of all apostolic preaching and teaching. So important is it, then, that it should stand before all men in the proper attitude. In reading the five historical books of the Christian religion, every intelligent reader must have observed that the issue concerning Jesus of Nazareth is: "Is He, or is He not, the Christ of whom Moses in the law, and all the prophets wrote?"

Verse 32

The resurrection: This is the bedrock and cornerstone of the Christian faith, dogmatically affirmed in the five historical books of our holy religion, and the quibbles of sinful men with regard to variations in the records themselves are powerless to cast any shadow over the fact itself. What is needed is honesty in the reading of them.

Archibald M. Hunter, *Introducing New Testament Theology*, p. 57 noted that the New Testament accounts of the resurrection all agree: (1) that the tomb was empty and (2) that the resurrection occurred the third day. Regarding the empty tomb, he said, "Paul's tradition implies it. So does the apostolic preaching in Acts. The four evangelists declare it. The silence of the Jews confirms it. In trying to fathom the mystery of the first Easter Day, we should think of something essentially other-worldly, a piece of heavenly reality, invading this world of time and sense and manifesting itself . . . We are concerned with an unmistakably divine event which yet occurred in this world of ours, on April day in A. D. 30 while Pontius Pilate was Roman governor of Judea."

"We are all witnesses . . ." Peter could not have meant "all" of the one hundred and twenty disciples, but all of the Twelve apostles. The blessed Mary herself, who was one of the one hundred and twenty, was not a witness of the resurrection; nor is there any record that Jesus ever appeared to her.

In the certification of so important an event as the resurrection to all times and conditions of men, Jesus trained and qualified a group of men fully equal to the task. They were outdoorsmen, unspoiled by any human sophistication, but still prepared in the most complete and perfect manner to witness and proclaim the resurrection. It is simply incredible that such men as the Twelve could have been led, either intentionally or otherwise, into believing the resurrection of Christ unless it had indeed occurred. This conscious limitation of the witnesses of Christ's resurrection was noted by Peter himself who said, "Him God raised up the third day, and gave Him to be made manifest, not to all the people, but unto witnesses that were chosen before of God, even to us, who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead. (Acts 10:40-41)

The resurrection of Christ as the fulfillment of God's oath to set a descendant of David upon His throne should be noted. Notice God's promise to David in the following verses, 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 89:3-4 and Psalm 89:35-37.

It is regrettable that many have envisioned the Davidic throne as something that would be upon earth, despite the fact of the throne in view here being compared to the sun or the moon, neither of which was ever on earth, and especially in view of the plain promise that it would be "in heaven," that is, the authority (or throne) would be in heaven.

The apostle Peter forever settled this question when he declared here in verse 31 that the resurrection of Christ was the fulfillment of the above promises to David. The Davidic throne was a type of the eternal throne and authority of Jesus Christ.

Verse 33

"To the right hand of God . . ." Christ had indeed appeared alive after His death and burial, and the apostles had seen Him ascend into heaven. "He has poured forth this . . ." Despite the fact of His being in heaven, Jesus was still concerned with earth and the men dwelling upon it. He had promised the apostles that "another Comforter" would be given unto them; and here Peter affirmed that the baptism of the apostles in the Holy Spirit, as audibly and visually evidenced by the miraculous demonstration somewhat earlier, had indeed come to pass as Jesus promised. F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 72 said, "Christ's

present impartation of the Spirit to the apostles, attended as it was by sensible signs, was a further open vindication of the claim that He was the exalted Messiah.” However, before leaving the subject, Peter would offer another proof.

Verses 34-35

This quotation from Psalm 110:1 indicated: (1) that the Son of David would also be the Lord of David (Matthew 22:44^{3ff}), and (2) that the Son of David would sit on the right hand of God, an idiomatic promise of the ascension into heaven. Peter did not have to prove that David himself had not ascended to heaven, for his grave was still in Jerusalem.

Having thus established a number of the most important truths regarding Christianity, especially the power and godhead of Jesus Christ, His resurrection from the dead, ascension into heaven, and sitting down upon the throne of David in heaven, and the fact of Christ’s having poured forth the Holy Spirit in such a divine demonstration as the multitude had witnessed, Peter then announced his conclusion.

Verse 36

“Let all the house of Israel . . . “ There seems to be good reason to understand these words as being addressed not to the dwellers in all those countries mentioned by Luke (Acts 2:8-12), but to the Jews of the Holy City itself, there being no evidence that the Diaspora had taken any hand in the rejection of Christ.

This justifies the conclusion that the “speaking” of all the Twelve in languages they had never learned, earlier that morning, was not in any sense a preview of this sermon. This sermon was the first of the gospel age, quite properly delivered “to the Jew first” as God had ordained; and , therefore, it may be concluded that those earlier “speakings” were concerned with gathering an audience for Peter’s message, the same purpose being evident in the rushing sound and other Divine manifestations of that hour.

Verse 37

“They were pierced to the heart . . .” is equivalent to saying that those people then and there believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no way they would

have followed to obey the word if they had not believed. Thus, right here in the gateway of the historical church stands the sure and certain truth that “faith alone” did not save the first Christians; nor can the conclusion be denied that “faith alone” never saved any Christians since then.

The terms of the salvation of those believers in Christ were immediately announced by that apostle to whom Jesus had promised that whatever he bound on earth would be bound in heaven. (Matthew 16:13ff)

“What shall we do . . . ?” In the light of Peter’s text, “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (verse 21) The meaning of this question is “What shall we do to be saved?” It has no other possible interpretation.

Verse 38

As long as this verse remains in the sacred New Testament, the terms of admission into Christ’s kingdom shall continue to be understood as faith (those were already believers), repentance and baptism unto the remission of sins. The cavils and controversies of the post-Reformation period have not altered in the slightest particular what is so evident here. Space does not permit any exhaustive reply to the denials which are alleged against what Peter declared. Indeed, no complete answer is possible, because the cleverness and ingenuity of man have been exhausted in the vain efforts to shout baptism out of this verse as a God-imposed precondition of salvation. We shall note only a few.

A. C. Hervey, Pulpit Commentary, Vol, p. 54 wrote, “We have in this short verse the summary of Christian doctrine as regards man and God. Repentance and faith on the part of man—forgiveness of sins, or justification, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, or sanctification, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, or sanctification, on the part of God.”

Thus baptism is left out of the things regarding man’s part in the accomplishment of his salvation; and, while it is true that Hervey went on to affirm that all of this is “expressed in the sacrament of baptism,” it cannot be denied that such an exegesis denies what is so categorically affirmed here by inspiration, namely, that a man must repent and be baptized to receive the forgiveness of his sins

and the gift of the Spirit. This writer is glad to note a change among modern commentators toward a more scriptural view of the ordinance of baptism, as evidenced by the following.

F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 77 wrote, “The idea of an unbaptized Christian is simply not entertained in the New Testament.” William Barclay, *op. cit.*, p. 70 wrote, “In the early church it was the universal practice of the church that the new convert was baptized immediately.”

A. M. Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 79 wrote, “The rite was first practiced in obedience to a command of the risen Lord . . . dates back to the day of Pentecost . . . was administered “into Christ,” or “in the name of Christ,” signifying that the baptized person passed into His possession. The mode was immersion, and baptism normally coincided with the reception of the Holy Spirit.”

G. R. Beasley-Murray, *op. cit.*, p: 278-279 wrote, “Baptism is the occasion when the Spirit brings to new life him that believes in the Son of Man. We must ungrudgingly recognize that the New Testament does not permit us to divide between the new life of Christ and the new life of the Spirit in baptism. (We) should bear steadily in view that the difficulties and the misunderstandings that have surrounded this doctrine, through the change of the context in which the churches have set baptism, do not arise in the New Testament. They should not be permitted to affect our interpretation of its evidence.”

Glimpses of the truth appearing in such comments are a vast improvement over many of the wild allegations of the nineteenth century; and it is devoutly hoped that men will come to accept what is so patently stated in the text before us, namely, that forgiveness of sins and the gift of God’s Spirit are promised after both repentance and baptism (also after faith), obedience of the believer to both requirements being made an absolute precondition of salvation.

One other common misunderstanding will be noted here, and it concerns this, “You shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit . . .” Here, as Beasley-Murray, *Ibid.*, p. 105 pointed out, “The gift of the Spirit will be given in or immediately upon baptism,” whereas “The Samaritans are evangelized by Phillip and baptized by him without receiving the Holy Spirit.” This, of course, is viewed as a discrepancy by many; but the problem is resolved in the knowledge that at

Pentecost those baptized received the gift ordinary of the Spirit, which is the earnest of our inheritance; whereas, a special dispensation of the Spirit “through the laying on of the apostles’ hands” is indicted in the case of the Samaritans.

It is a mistake to view the gift of the Spirit as promised to all who were baptized on Pentecost as anything other than the gift ordinary. Everett J. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 303 said, “There is no indication that the apostles laid hands on these new converts that they might receive the Holy Spirit.”

Thomas Scott, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, p. 439 stated, “There is nothing to lead us to imagine that they received any miraculous gifts of any kind. There can be no doubt that the gift of the Holy Spirit is in view here is that which all without exception received . . . which is bestowed upon all members of the family of our heavenly Father.”

Verse 39

“All who are far off . . .” certainly includes the Gentiles; but Peter, like many of the prophets of the Old Testament, was here uttering words, under the power of his inspiration, that he himself did not fully understand; for it took a miracle, later on to convince Peter that the Gentiles should be included as proper recipients of the gospel message. (Chapter 10:14-15, 1 Peter 1:12)

As a matter of simple fact, the command to believe, repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins and with the promise of receiving the Holy Spirit afterward—this is a timeless and universal commandment of the Christian gospel, as clear from this verse. None are exempted, or denied, or promised redemption without compliance.

Verse 40

“With many other words . . .” Thus, Luke was giving a resume of this great sermon, and not a verbatim account of every word of it; and from this, we may be sure that where Peter is quoted, he is quoted accurately.

The promised Spirit had come; henceforth forever, until the final judgment, that Spirit would be in the world; the terms of accepting the gospel had been announced, and they would never be changed. Therefore the final word to humanity was: “Save yourself from this perverse generation . . .”

G. Campbell Morgan, *The Unfolding Message of the Bible*, p. 339 said, “You say that you are waiting for the Spirit? Nothing of the kind . . . The Spirit is waiting for you. No, we are not waiting for him; how often He is waiting for us!”

Of all the wicked falsehoods ever devised by Satan and received by sinful men, the greatest is this: “There is nothing you can do to be saved!” The existence of this satanic lie has been continuous throughout the Christian dispensation; but this verse is the total refutation of it. How does one “save himself”? Just as Peter said, “Repent and be baptized.” The saved person does not merit, or even earn, redemption; but he saves himself in the sense of fulfilling the conditions without which he can never be saved. (1 Timothy 4:16 and Philippians 2:12)

The great teaching of these verses, taken in conjunction with what Peter said, is that man is himself responsible for whether or not he is saved. If he obeys the Lord, he will be saved, not as a matter of merit, but by the grace of God; but if he does not obey, not even the grace of God can reach him and redeem him. Nor is there any implication in these teachings that an absolutely perfect obedience is prerequisite to redemption, because absolutely perfect obedience does not lie within the area of what man is fully able to do, provided only that he desires to do it; and that is the basis of the conclusion that there can be no waiver of what Peter commanded on Pentecost. It will be bound in heaven. It is simply incredible that most commentators pass over this sentence with no comment: “Be saved from this perverse generation”!

Verse 41

At the giving of the Law, three thousand souls broke the Law and died; on this occasion three thousand souls obeyed the gospel and were saved.

Verse 42

“The apostles’ teaching . . .” As this church did, so should every church do, the apostles’ teaching being the only doctrinal authority in the Christian religion. This is limited, of course, to the teachings of the New Testament.

“And to fellowship . . .” Alexander Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 18 rendered fellowship “as “contribution” stating that, “the contribution of money for the wants of the brotherhood appears to be its import in this passage as in Romans 15:16.”

“To the breaking of bread . . .” Albert Barnes, *op. cit.*, p. 64, thought that it was impossible to tell whether this has reference to “taking ordinary food, feasts of charity, or the Lord’s Supper”; but Milligan, Boles and Campbell were certain that the reference is to the Lord’s Supper.

Alexander Campbell supported his conclusion thus, “The expression itself may designate an ordinary meal, as in Luke 24:35; but that here would be an unmeaning notice. There can be no doubt that the Eucharist at this period was preceded uniformly by a common repast, as when the ordinance was instituted. Most scholars hold that this was the prevailing usage in the first centuries after Christ; and we have traces of this practice in 1 Corinthians 11:20ff, and in all probability in verse 46, below.”

“The breaking of bread . . .” is only mentioned in this passage and is held by the Roman Catholic Church to support their custom of distributing only the bread to their congregations, calling it “communion under one kind.” However, as the scholarly Hackett (as quoted by Campbell, *Ibid*, said, (this mention of the bread alone) “is obviously a case in which the leading act of a transaction gives name to the transaction itself.”

The figure of speech thus used is synecdoche, and the Protestant world have little complaint against Catholics for missing the synecdoche here in view of the fact they themselves have missed it so spectacularly in reading salvation by faith as salvation by “faith alone.” The errors are one and the same.

“To prayer . . .” Whereas in Judaism, prayers were offered at stated times of the day, the Christians offered prayers at any and all times, and in any and all places.

Verse 43

This verse gives us proof that only the Twelve were baptized in the Holy Spirit. Here it is clear enough that the one hundred twenty were not able to do the wonders and signs which accompanied the Twelve, indicating most certainly that they, the one hundred twenty, were not included in the baptism of the Holy Spirit which the apostles received.

Regarding what these signs were, conjecture is idle; however, it is reported later in Acts that Peter raised Dorcas from the dead. (Chapter 9:41) The signs here mentioned were of such a powerful and supernatural nature that fear came upon the whole community of Christians, and presumably upon many in Jerusalem besides them.

Verse 44

“Who had believed were together . . .” In verse 41, we learned that “received the word” is the same as “believed what Peter had preached about Jesus being the Messiah.”

“Were together” speaks of the marvelous unity of this congregation. It speaks of unity in mind, in purpose, in faith, in heart, and in action. They were united because they were obedient believers in Jesus Christ. This is the only way to unity for which Christ prayed.

“Had all things in common . . .” “All things,” that is, their property and possessions. This is not absolute communism, where everything is confiscated and placed in a central store-house and then doled out equally to all. None of the early Christians were required to give his goods or sell his property. So it is a mistake to say the early church practiced absolute communism.

What it does say is that Christians were willing to use whatever they had when others had need. Christianity teaches that we are responsible for the welfare of our brothers in Christ, and that we should render service, money, and everything if need be, for the welfare of our brethren.

Another reason for such a practice (besides the evangelistic one) was that many of those who came from abroad to the feast of Pentecost may have stayed longer than anticipated, and they would now be denied the hospitality by the Jews who had not yet embraced Christianity.

Verse 45

“They began selling their property and possessions . . .” They sold as much as was necessary to meet the needs, as the rest of the verse shows. Whatever they had of value was gladly relinquished and the money given from time to time and as the need arose.

“Sharing with them all . . .” All the ready cash received from the sale of the real estate and personal possessions was distributed according to the need (not an equality).

Verse 46

“From house to house . . .” indicates that there had been no abolition of private property, nor the removal of the means of production from the hands of individuals; and, therefore, what we behold in the preceding verses is not “communism” at all, but Christian generosity. There is no reference here to the Lord’s Supper.

Verse 47

“Favor with all the people . . .” E. H. Plumptre, *The Acts of Apostles*, p. 15 said, “The new life of the apostles, in part probably their liberal almsgiving, had revived the early popularity of their Master with the common people. The Sadducee priests were, probably, the only section that looked them with malignant fear.”

It is difficult to imagine a more significant chain of events than those related in this chapter, closing as it does, with this reference to a successful, ongoing church, faithful to God and to each other. It all began beautifully enough, but Satan would not long permit the spread of Divine truth without opposition; and Luke quickly moved to relate developments which would disperse this happy church.

CHAPTER 3

This chapter develops the story of the healing of a congenital cripple by the apostles, Peter and John.

Verse 1

“Peter and John . . .” How great must have been the friendship of these two men. They had been partners in the fishing business on Galilee when Jesus called them to be “fishers of men,” and both of them had earned the distinction of membership in the inner circle of the Twelve who witnessed such events as

the Transfiguration, the raising of Jairus' daughter, and the agony in Gethsemane. Here, it would seem that they were following the pattern of going "two by two," as when the Lord had first sent them on their apostolic mission.

"Up to the temple . . ." Christians, for some considerable time after Pentecost, continued to frequent the temple, especially at the hours of prayer, not merely for the purpose of praying, but also, it may be supposed for the opportunities afforded by such occasions for preaching Christ to the people. In time, God would remove the temple; and the separation from Judaism would become complete.

Regarding the chronology of just when the event described in this chapter occurred, some have been quite anxious to suppose that a long period had elapsed since Pentecost. Sir William M. Ramsay, *Pictures of the Apostolic Church*, p. 19 declared, "It is not made clear at this point whether weeks or months or years had passed," evidently preferring the longest interval possible. He made a preposterous deduction from this, affirming that whereas, in Peter's speech on Pentecost, Sir William M. Ramsey, *Ibid*, p. 20, continued, "The way of salvation was described as consisting of three steps, repentance, baptism, and remission of sins . . . now the nature of this process is better understood . . . the idea of faith is fundamental in this address. Through faith comes healing."

Ramsay's exegesis, above, is the classical example of the lengths to which men will go in their efforts to get baptism out of the plan of redemption. Ramsey's argument includes these affirmations: (1) that Peter did not properly understand the plan of redemption on Pentecost, (2) that he mistakenly included baptism as a precondition of salvation, (3) that a very long period elapsed between chapter two and three, giving Peter time to learn the truth he did not know earlier, (4) that when Peter announced the terms of salvation in chapter three he stressed "faith (Ramsey apparently did not notice that Peter made no mention at all of faith in the announcement offering salvation in 3:19).

It would be impossible to imagine a more fallacious exegesis based upon this chapter, the most astounding thing in the exegesis being the denial absolutely of Peter's inspiration on Pentecost immediately after his baptism in the Holy Spirit!

“The hours of prayer . . .” J. R. Dummelow, Commentary on the Holy Bible, p. 822 said, “The hours of prayer were the third when the morning sacrifice was offered, the sixth (noon), and the ninth, the time of the evening sacrifice.,” the ninth hour being 3:00 o’clock in the afternoon.”

Verse 2

The cripple in view here had been disabled from birth, being at the time of his healing more than forty years old (4:22); the fact of his having to be carried showed how complete was his disability.

“Beautiful . . .” There were nine doors to the temple, all being 45’ high, except the gate of Nicanor which was 75’ high, facing eastward, and very richly adorned. It is thought to be by many that this was the door mentioned here. Of it Josephus says, “It was adorned after a most costly manner, as having much richer and thicker plates of silver and gold . . . it was made of Corinthian brass. The gold had been poured upon it by Alexander, the father of Tiberius.”

Verses 3-5

The beggar is not here represented as having any faith in Christ, or indeed that he had any other concern than the hope of receiving gifts from those entering the temple. J. W. McGarvey, New Commentary on Acts, p. 35 declared, “It is evident from the account of the cure that previous to it he had no faith at all.”

Verse 6

Peter said, “I do not possess silver and gold . . .” but “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk . . .” This means “by the authority of” Christ, showing that Peter and John were acting in a manner consistent with Christ’s will, as being in Him and identified with Him.

There is no other authority in the Christian religion; all things are to be done by the authority of Christ. Even the baptismal ceremony (Matthew 28:18-20) is not “in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, but “into” that triple name, but still done by the authority of Christ.

Verse 7

The beggar did not respond by trying to rise up; but the apostle took him by the hand and raised him up, whereupon the strength came. Such a comment as this that, “He sprang up and found his feet for the first time in his life,” fails to take note of the fact that the beggar did not spring up at all; he was lifted up.

Verse 8

This was the signal for all to behold that the Messianic Age indeed had come upon the world. Isaiah had written of the times of the Messiah that, “Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy.” (Isaiah 35:6) Thus began to be fulfilled the promise of Jesus to the Twelve that great “signs” would accompany them on their apostolic mission. (Mark 16:17ff)

Verses 9-10

These verses report the impression the miracle created among the people who were witnesses of it, the understandable result being the wonder and amazement of all. Even the priestly enemies of Jesus admitted that it was a notable miracle they could not deny. (Chapter 4:16)

Verse 11

“Clinging to Peter and John . . .” Clinging to the apostles was a natural expression of the beggar’s gratitude; also, perhaps a childish fear had seized him, making him fearful that the healing might not last if he permitted the apostles out of his sight.

“All the people ran together . . .” Thus the utility of the wonder is apparent in the gathering of a mighty throng of people who would hear the gospel. There was always a design in everything that God did.

“Portico of Solomon . . .” This porch is named twice in Acts, the other place being 5:12, and once in John 10:28. It was located in the court of the heathen on the eastern side of the temple. Alexander Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 21 said, “The opinion has long been, and still is, that it was placed on the spot where Solomon had made the entrance to the old temple, but still retained its name. Some distinguished moderns think it was the identical porch Solomon built.”

Verse 12

When God does mighty things through His servants, the natural man is strongly tempted to glorify the servant rather than the Lord. So it was here, as it was with Paul and Barnabas at Lystra (14:12); but Peter quickly moved to correct their error.

Verse 13

“The God of Abraham . . .” This was the ancient Jewish formula for calling God’s name; and Peter used it here, perhaps, for its appeal to Jewish minds.

“Whom you delivered up . . . and disowned . . .” The wickedness of the conduct of the chosen people was dramatized by Peter by his emphasis upon their conduct before the heathen governor, and in the face of that governor’s determined efforts to release Jesus. In the light of Peter’s charge here, there is no way to soften the guilt of Israel, although, to be sure, Pilate was equally guilty.

“His servant Jesus . . .” By these words, Peter clearly identified our Lord as the suffering Servant of Isaiah 42:1, 52:13, and 58:11, thus taking this exceedingly important understanding of the prophecies back to the very door of that first Pentecost. This, of course, is not a denial that Jesus was also the Son of God. As Alexander Campbell, *Ibid.*, p. 22 noted, “Jesus was personally a Son, officially a Servant.”

“Glorified His Servant Jesus . . .” Orin Root, *Acts*, p. 23 observed, God glorified Jesus repeatedly, “In acknowledging Him at His baptism and transfiguration, by working through Him the mighty miracles, and further by working the present miracles, and further by working the present miracle of healing which had been called forth in the “name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.”

Verses 14-15

“Asked for a murderer . . .” This was another factor that aggravated the guilt of Israel, and it was proper that Peter should have mentioned it here. The choice of Barabbas by the Jewish populace was as tragic an event as ever occurred, for it was part and parcel of the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus. Within a generation, an entire company of the most reprobate robbers infested

Jerusalem, taking charge of the temple itself, and filling the Holy of Holies with dead bodies.

“The Prince of Life . . .” This pleasing expression is actually a mistranslation, the true reading being “Author of Life Eternal.” J. W. McGarvey also supported this translation, pointing out that the word rendered “Prince” also occurs in the book of Hebrews 12:2, where it is properly translated, “Author.”

“Whom God raised from the dead . . .” As always, the burden of apostolic preaching was the resurrection of the Son of God; and here Peter stressed it, together with the fact of the apostles being witnesses of it.

Verse 16

In this verse appears the only mention of faith in this whole narrative; and it is mentioned here, not as a condition of receiving salvation (although it is so, of course} but as an explanation of the power that had healed the cripple, the faith in view being not of the cripple at all, but of the men who healed him.

The conceit that Peter’s mention of faith in this verse was due to his having discovered by some means or other that baptism was no longer a condition of salvation is founded upon a denial of the sacred text. The terms of redemption are not in view at all in this verse; but what is taught is that the apostles (already saved) had performed this wonder by reason of their faith in Jesus Christ; and, at this point in the narrative, Peter had not told either the healed beggar or the multitude what to do to be saved. He would do that later. (3:19)

Don De Welt, *Acts Made Actual*, p. 59 said, “The power of performing miracles was given to the apostles by virtue of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but they needed to exercise faith before this power could be used.”

Verses 17-18

“You acted in ignorance . . .” This extenuation of the guilt of Israel was mentioned by Peter for the sake of a more persuasive appeal to his hearers; and of course, what Peter said of their being ignorant is true. However, Peter was not specific about the area of their ignorance, which was limited, especially as regards the rulers. The leaders of Israel knew that Christ was the long-expected Messiah, a holy and righteous man, and that he was the heir of the theocracy,

and the rightful claimant of the throne of David—all this they most certainly knew; because, Jesus said of them that they said among themselves, “This is the heir; come let us kill Him, and the inheritance shall be ours.” (Mark 12:7)

The exact point of their ignorance regarded the fact of Jesus being God come in the flesh, the very person who would judge them in the last day; that they did not know. The infinite patience and forbearance of God appear in Peter’s making every possible allowance in softening the guilt of Israel’s rejection of Christ.

“That his Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled . . .” Moreover, Peter stated here that their ignorant rejection had also fulfilled the prophecies of Jesus’ sufferings. Having thus tempered, to the extent it was possible, the guilt of those who rejected and crucified the Christ, Peter at once appealed to them to obey the gospel, announcing the very same terms of salvation which he had previously spoken on Pentecost.

Verse 19

On Pentecost (2:38), Peter had preached: (1) repent, (2) be baptized, (3) for the remission of sins, and (4) you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Exactly the same four factors are in view here: (1) repent, (2) return, (3) that your sins may be wiped away, (4) and that refreshing from the Lord’s presence would follow.

It is universally admitted that (1), (2), and (4) of the above factors in both sequences are synonymous; and if we had known nothing at all concerning any of these things, the incidence of “be baptized” and “return” in exactly corresponding places in these sequences would prove that they mean the same thing. Don D. Welt, *Ibid.*, p. 60 expressed it, “The thought behind ‘return’ was nothing short of baptism. The Jews no doubt had witnessed the baptism of persons every day (2:47); and thus when Peter called upon them to “repent and return,” they knew exactly what he inferred.”

H. Leo Boles, *op. cit.*, p. 59 also agreed, declaring that, “The blotting out of sin is equivalent to remission of sins; and being baptized is tantamount to turning again.”

It is to the great reformation preacher, Benjamin Franklin that we turn for one of the most impressive analyses regarding “return” or “turn again.” It actually means” be converted,” as the translators of the American Version rendered it in three different passages: Acts 28:27, Matthew 18:1, 3, and Acts 3:19. The command, whether “turn again” or “be converted,” was used by the inspired writers to indicate something that men must do; and the status of those to whom these several words were addressed shows what was meant. In Acts 28:27, the people commanded to be converted were unbelievers. In Matthew 18:1, 3 they were already believers, and in Acts 3:19 it has the meaning that people who had already believed and repented were yet required to be baptized.

Thus, the actual rendering of “turn again” or “return” as used by the inspired writers, is “complete whatever is lacking” to bring one into Christ. In this verse, the thing lacking after faith and repentance was most certainly their being baptized into Christ.

But the question arises, why did Peter use this rather indirect way of stating what they must do, especially in view of what he had so flatly said on Pentecost? The answer must lie in the fact of his inspiration. God always gives the skeptic, the willful, and the unbeliever a way out. Our Lord said shortly before raising the daughter of Jarius, “The child is not dead, but asleep!” (Mark 5:39) Thus leaving men room to make their own moral decision. So it is here. If one is determined to reject baptism as clearly binding upon all men, this verse gives him a straw to catch at, the excuse to refuse what is morally impossible for him already.

Verses 20-21

Whereas in 2:38 Peter had promised that remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit would follow their obeying the gospel, there is here assigned another consequence, namely, that (God) may send the Christ, etc. Christ had already come and completed the work of His First Advent, making this a reference to the Second Coming, which in this verse is promised as an event that would be hastened by the people obeying the gospel, indicating as, J. W. McGarvey, *op. cit.*, p. 63 said, that, “A certain amount of work in the saving of men was to be accomplished before His coming. This is indicted by the qualifying remark,

“whom the heavens must receive until the restoration of all things whereof God had spoken by the mouth of His holy prophets.”

There is a definite hint here that Christ’s Second Advent will not appear until a certain number of souls have been redeemed; and, that being true, one of the reasons for the severe weeping of Jesus over the fate of Jerusalem due to their rejecting Him is evident. IF the Jews had received Christ, there can be no doubt that Christianity would have been the choice of a far greater number of men, and God’s purpose could have been realized much sooner; and Peter definitely says as much right here. The tragic rejection of Israel, however, had the effect of extending the long agony of mankind, vastly increasing the numbers of men who would be born, and thus fulfilling the curse upon Eve that God would “multiply thy sorrow and thy conception.” (Genesis 3:16 KJV)

Thus, the human race blew its second chance in Israel’s rejection of the Christ, the same being a disaster for humanity, fully comparable to the original debacle in Eden. Here, Peter pleaded with the people to obey the gospel that God might send the Christ, etc., in His Second Advent.

“Whom heaven must receive . . .” means that Jesus will not appear again until a certain time future, at which time “the restoration of all things,” in one sense, shall have been completed, and to be followed by certain other restorations. Here again one thinks of the primary and secondary arches of the rainbow, as so often in prophecy.

“Until the period of restoration of all things . . .” The primary and immediate thing in view here is the accomplishment of all those things which had been prophesied by the Old Testament prophets, verse 21b being a qualifier of the things to be restored; and, concerning those things, the Second Advent will be at the end, not the beginning of the restoration. The premillennial views are not supported by this text. Christ explained that John the Baptist’s coming to “restore all things” was fully accomplished (Matthew 17:11-12); and men “knew Him not.” Also, none of the outlandish things the Jews thought would happen when Elijah “restored all things” ever took place.

It is, in all probability, certain that the “restoration of all things,” as taught by the prophets, is now going on under the reign of Christ, and that all shall be

accomplished without the majority of mankind ever being in the slightest degree aware of it. Jesus Himself made the work and the events of John's ministry, in certain particulars, typical of His own. Just as John was killed, so would Jesus be crucified, etc.

Despite this, there is the definite suggestion in places like this of a further restoration of "all things," following the judgment. J. R. Dummelow, *op. cit.*, p. 823 believed, "It means the restoration of the whole universe to its original and planned perfection . . . as in the 'new heavens and the new earth,' (2 Peter 3:13)."

THE PROPHET LIKE UNTO MOSES

Peter pressed his appeal by his presentation of Christ as the mighty Prophet like unto Moses.

Verses 22-23

This quotation is from Deuteronomy 18:15ff, which emphasizes the typical qualities in the life of the great Lawgiver of Israel, Moses. This is an extensive area of study, because there are many likenesses between Moses and Christ. Both were the sons of virgin princesses, Moses by adoption, Jesus by the virgin birth.

Significantly, Moses was rejected by Israel, but Moses ruled them despite that; and the inference from Peter's mention of this prophecy is that Jesus, despite the fact of his being rejected, will nevertheless be the ruler of God's true Israel.

"Destroyed from among the people . . ." In its spiritual application, this means that all who do not harken to that Prophet, who is Christ, shall be lost eternally.

Verse 24

Peter's words here show that all of the Old Testament writers before witness to the coming of Christ and to qualities and events of the kingdom He would receive. Some have questioned whether Samuel spoke of Christ, but of course he did. It was He who anointed David king and delivered the prophecy of David's perpetual throne (2 Samuel 7:12-16), all of which was fulfilled in Christ.

Verse 25

‘Sons of the prophets . . . ‘ seems to distinguish among the sons of Abraham, as between the secular descendants like the Pharisees, and those of the true spiritual likeness, here called “sons of the prophets,” who were also posterity of Abraham, but in the more meaningful sense.

“Sons of the covenant . . .” clearly refers to the true Israelites, the spiritual seed of Abraham, such as Nathaniel and Zacchaeus.

“And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed . . .” The promise to Abraham is recorded in Genesis 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; and 28:14. “All the families of earth . . .” envisions the blessing being poured out upon Gentiles as well as Jews; and “in thy seed” is not a promise that the multitudes of Abraham’s posterity will bless mankind, but that the blessing shall come through the seed singular, which is Christ. (Galatians 3:16)

Alexander Campbell, op. cit., p. 24 commented on the Jews being sons of the prophets, taking a slightly different view saying, “They were educated by the sixteen Jewish prophets, the same being read in their synagogues weekly. Hence, we presume, they were called sons of the prophets; and therefore ought to have recognized and acknowledged their own Messiah.”

Verse 26

“For you (the Jews) first . . .” (Romans 1:16) This was the invariable rule of apostolic preaching; but the words inherently contain a prophecy that others shall receive the gospel also; and Peter’s use of this slogan in context is a warning that the right to receive or reject the gospel never pertained to the Jew only, but to the Jew first; and afterward the Gentiles would also be called.

“By turning . . . from your wicked ways . . .” The great blessing Jesus came to deliver was not a re-establishment of the old Solomonic empire, but a spiritual blessing marked by the forgiveness of sins, the recognition of God’s Spirit, and a turning of the people away from their wickedness.

It is not hard to understand why secular Israel wanted no such blessings; millions of men in all generations are just like those ancient Israelites. The

acceptance of Christianity by one who is called a Jew leads at once to his loss of identity as a Jew, afterward being, not a Jew, but a Christian.

CHAPTER 4

The glorious success of the gospel at Pentecost and for some time afterward could not last. The mighty dragon who had attempted to devour the Christ, who had been “caught up to God and to His throne” (Revelation 12:5), then turned the full strength of his fury against the Woman, that is, the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. The inherent hatred of truth and righteousness on the part of the powers of darkness was quickly manifested in the bitter opposition encountered by the apostolic preachers of the gospel. The first move against the church came suddenly.

Verse 1

Peter’s sermon was interrupted by those inveterate enemies of Christ, the Sadducees, who descended upon the apostles in sufficient strength to stop their preaching and cast them into prison. Significantly, the Pharisees were not a part of the arresting party; and, as J. R. Dummelow noted, “It is a mark of historic truth that the chief opposition to the apostles is here assigned to the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection. The Pharisees, who affirmed it, were comparatively friendly; and not a few of them became Christians. (Acts 15:5)”

SADDUCEES

This Jewish sect was composed of proud, secular materialists who denied the existence of a spiritual world, holding that neither angels nor demons existed, denying any such thing as the resurrection, and rejecting the Old Testament Scriptures, except for parts of them which had political utility, and also refusing the traditions of the elders. Through wealth and political power they had gained control of the religious apparatus which ran the temple, the office of the high priest being regularly filled from this group. Their pipe-dream of having silenced forever the claims of Jesus Christ by their wanton murder of Him was rudely shattered by the incident recorded in the last chapter.

Not only was Christ alive, but He had ascended to the right hand of God, had poured out the marvelous power of the Holy Spirit upon the Twelve; and the astounding miracles that had accompanied the personal ministry of Christ were continuing through the apostles who wrought such signs “in the name of” that same Christ!

“The captain of the temple guard . . .” This officer was of high rank. F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, p. 95 writes that this officer came, “From one of the chief-priestly families, ranking next to the high priest, commanding the temple guard of a picked body of Levites.” He is presumably the one who commanded the sentries stationed at the tomb of Jesus. (Matthew 27:65ff)

Whichever “captain” was in this arresting party, it is certain that he, as well as the group, knew for certainty that the resurrection of Christ had occurred.

Luke’s purpose in his unfolding narrative was correctly noted by Everett F. Harrison, *Wycliffe Commentary*, p. 395 who wrote, “One of the main purposes of Acts is to show that the Jews who rejected and crucified Jesus continued their rebellion against God by rejecting the gospel of the resurrected and ascended Jesus proclaimed by the apostles.”

Even the wicked Sadducees, however, were to have another opportunity to be saved. Their rejection of Christ, although grossly wicked, was not the final rejection; for they could yet have obeyed the gospel and have received the gift of eternal life. John Wesley, *New Testament Commentary*, in loco, observed, “So wisely did God order that they should first hear a full testimony to the truth in the temple, and then in the great council; to which they (the apostles) could have had no access, had they not been brought before it as criminals.”

Verse 2

“Being greatly disturbed . . .” “Indignant,” more accurately describes the attitude of the priests. Sure enough, Christ was risen from the dead; and that eventually foreseen by them (Matthew 27:65) in which the last error was worse than the first, had truly come to pass. Moreover, the great popularity of the gospel message threatened their political base, promised to hold them up before

the people as murderers, as ignoramuses concerning the Holy Scriptures, and as deserving of universal contempt.

To proud, arrogant, men like themselves, the situation had become intolerable; and their venomous hatred overflowed against the apostles.

Verse 3

W. R. Walker, *Studies in Acts*, p. 30 said, “This jailing of the apostles was illegal; no charge was placed against them—it was a high-handed abuse of authority.”

The night trial of Jesus, which was also illegal, did, on this occasion, defer the trial till daytime on the morrow. This was not due to any concern for holy law, but they simply needed time to figure out what they would do.

The unhappiness of the Sadducees over the fact of Jesus’ resurrection and successful proclamation of the gospel was commented upon thus by Thomas Scott, *The Henry-Scott Commentary*, p. 443 saying, “Miserable is their case to whom the glory of Christ’s kingdom is a grief; for, since the glory of that kingdom is everlasting, it follows of course that their grief shall be everlasting also.”

Verse 4

“Who had heard the message . . .” Alexander Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 25 said, “This has reference to the gospel of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” This use of “the word” as a designation of the Christian gospel goes back to Christ Himself. (Matthew 13:23)

“Believed . . .” stands not as the sole condition of salvation, but as a synecdoche for all preconditions of redemption in Jesus’ name. B. W. Johnson, *The New Testament with Explanatory Notes*, p. 429 said, “This “believed” is a usual Scriptural expression for the whole change wrought by belief.”

“About five thousand . . .” Some ambiguity exists with regard to understanding the “five thousand” here as inclusive of the three thousand on Pentecost, or as an additional five thousand; but, as H. Leo Boles, *Commentary*

on the Acts, p. 64 said, "The best scholarship is in favor of two thousand being converted on this occasion, and so the number came to be about five thousand."

Verses 5-6

This assembly was known as the Sanhedrin, a form of Jewish Supreme Court composed of the presiding officer, who was the high priest, and seventy others. It was the same body which had demanded and received the crucifixion of Jesus.

"In Jerusalem . . ." The council chamber in which they met was traditionally in the temple; but about A.D. 30, they changed their meeting place. Robert Milligan, *Analysis of the New Testament*, p. 325 said, "It was changed to a court on the east side of the temple mount. The meeting at the palace of the high priest was irregular."

"Annas the high priest . . ." There are various references in the New Testament to Caiaphas as high priest, or to Annas as high priest. Luke denominated both as holders of the office concurrently. F. N. Peloubet, *Bible Dictionary* (under "Annas") wrote, "In the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas (Luke 3:2), it was altogether correct to refer to either one of them as high priest. The circumstances that brought this condition about are well known. Annas was deposed from his high office by Tiberius in 14 A. D.

A penalty had incurred through his excess in executing one of his enemies; but the Jews did not honor the Emperor's deposition, still recognizing Annas as the rightful holder of the office; however, Rome controlled the patronage, and the office was rotated among no less than five of Annas' sons with Caiaphas his son-in-law also holding it for a period of time. A. C. Hervey, *The Pulpit Commentary, Acts, Volume 18*, p. 123, said his sons who held the office were: "Eleazar, Jonathan, Theophilus, Matthias, and Annas."

"John . . ." in verse 6 is thought by some to have been the same as Jonathan, son of Annas, and successor to Caiaphas." (John William Russell, *Compact Commentary on the New testament*, p. 289)

The record of those who controlled the assembly in view here reveals them to have been the hard cadre of Sadducean priests who sat at the heart of official

Jewry. They were as evil and unscrupulous a group as any that may be found in history, fit architects indeed of the crucifixion of the Son of God.

Verse 7

This shows that the Sanhedrin had not been able to formulate any charge against the apostles; therefore the question was to induce them to talk in the hope that they would turn some of their words into an indictment. However, both the worldly antagonist and the holy apostles knew perfectly well why they were there; and Peter at once launched into his message.

"Have you done this . . ." F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 99 tells us that in the Greek, There is a scornful emphasis in the position of the pronoun (have "you") at the end of verse 7, meaning "people like you."

Verse 8

"Rulers and elders of the people . . ." Peter's respectful language here teaches the same deference and respect of public officials which are binding upon all Christians; but, as E. H. Plumptre, *Elliott's Commentary*, p. 21 noted, there was a marked change in Peter saying, "A few weeks back he had quailed before the soldiers and servants in the palace of the high priest. But now he stands before the Sanhedrin and speaks in the language of respect—but also that of unflinching boldness."

Regarding the profound and dramatic change discernible in the apostles of Christ which began with the resurrection and was final after Pentecost, Albert Barnes, *op. cit.*, p. 77 truly declared that, "It is not possible to account for this change except on the supposition that this religion was true."

"Filled with the Holy Spirit . . ." Here began to be fulfilled the blessed promise of Jesus to the Twelve that they should not be concerned about what they should say when arraigned before earthly authorities, because the Holy Spirit in that hour would give them the message they were to deliver. (Matthew 10:17-19)

Verses 9-10

Peter moved quickly to the attack, charging the Sanhedrin with murdering the Son of God, and affirming that the great miracle in view had been accomplished by the authority of that same Christ whom they had crucified.

“This man stands . . .” It may be assumed that the man had been baptized into Christ since the miracle was wrought; because the New Testament reveals no other device by which any man was accounted to be “in Christ.” Peter’s words emphasized the fact of the spreading kingdom and the multiplication of disciples mentioned by Luke a bit earlier. (Verse 4) This, of course, would have further infuriated the Sadducees.

Verse 11

Peter had been present when the Lord first used this figure of Himself (Matthew 21:42), and he developed the idea further in 1 Peter 2:4-6. Psalm 118:22 has a prophecy of the rejected stone becoming the head of the corner; and it was founded upon an incident connected with the building of the temple. The first stone that came down from the quarry was most complicated, and the builders could not find a place for it. It was dragged to a corner of the building area and in time covered with debris. When the building was completed, there was no cornerstone until someone remembered the rejected stone which fit perfectly.

The Sanhedrin was the religious builders who rejected the head of the corner, Christ; and Peter hurled this charge in their teeth.

Verse 12

“There is salvation in no one else . . .” J. W. McGarvey, Commentary on Acts, p. 72 wrote, “This declaration is universal; and it shows that every human being who is saved at all will be saved in the name of Christ. If those who do not know Him or believe Him are saved, still in some way their salvation will be in His name.” “By which we must be saved . . .” H. Leo Boles wrote, “In the Greek, the “we” is the last word of the Greek sentence; it means, “we priests, elders, scribes, fishermen—all of us must be saved by faith and obedience in the Christ.”

Thus Peter included his wicked judges in those invited to participate in the new life in Christ. The priests however, rejected the way of salvation taught by Jesus. They were among those such as were mentioned by R. E. Walker, op. cit., p. 33 writing, “Who imagine themselves so lovely in God’s sight that He simply could not afford to damn them. Such loveliness may be either of character or culture; and both classes of those self-righteous bigots are equally certain that heaven would be impoverished without them. They feel that they need no forgiveness.”

Peter preached the same plan of salvation to the Sanhedrin which he had proclaimed on Pentecost, and before the Gate Beautiful of the temple; but our own age, no less than that, prefers some other way of salvation. For example Daniel Soper, as quoted by William Barclay, *Turning to God*, p. 102 speaking of the crowd whose questions he has sought to answer for so many years says, (men have) “no time for a religion which confines itself to the work of converting individuals and has nothing authoritative to say about war or unemployment.”

Soper certainly read the popular mind accurately; but the truth is that the church’s business is not concerned with social or political issues at all, except in a peripheral sense. Like Christ Himself, the church must teach men regarding the salvation of their souls. Let churches leave the social problems to the government, which can botch them up better than any church could! Loving concern for brothers and sisters in the Lord is taught and is mandatory for Christians; but the involvement in the social issues of the times is always, for the church a sacrifice of first priorities for those which are secondary.

The unique and glorious message of salvation in Jesus’ name, through faith and obedience to the gospel, has no parallels. How precious, how glorious, how past all human ability fully to comprehend it, is the name of Jesus! J. Hastings, *Great Texts of the Bible, Acts and Romans*, p. 79, wrote, “The victory has been enshrined in a Name. All the power of the Nazareth victory, and of the Wilderness victory, all the power of the great climax victory of Calvary, and of the Resurrection morning—all is packed into one word, a Name, the Name of Jesus.”

Verse 13

“Uneducated and untrained . . .” Everett F. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 796 said, “This does not refer to their intelligence or literacy but to the fact that they were not schooled in the traditions of the Scribes.”

J. R. Dummelow, *op. cit.*, p. 824 said, “Ignorant should be translated private persons.” Don De Welt, *Acts Made Actual*, p. 67 said: “Some men are prone to set at naught all others” as ignorant and unlearned, who have not been trained in just the way and manner they have. From all these things, dear Lord, deliver us!” It is the smug and arrogant pride of the Sadducees which surfaces here, there being utterly no reflection upon the intelligence and understanding of those great men who were the apostles of the Son of God. Luke, in this place, was clearly giving not his own evaluation of the Twelve, but that of the Sanhedrin.

Verse 14

Had this wonder been performed on the Sabbath day, they might have charged the apostles with breaking the Sabbath, as they had so often falsely charged the Lord; but Peter’s choice of the issue which he would defend was truly inspired. He said in effect, “I suppose you wish to examine us regarding the good deed which has been done to the impotent man.” There was not a thing which those hypocrites could say against it; therefore, they decided to have a caucus about it.

Verses 15-16

The utter bankruptcy of the Sanhedrin’s position is plain in these verses. Thomas Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 444 said, “We do not find that the council gave any reason why the doctrine of Christ must be suppressed; they could not say that it was either false or dangerous, or of any evil tendency; and they were ashamed to own the true reason, that is, that it testified against their hypocrisy, wickedness and tyranny.”

What the Sanhedrin did not do is of epic significance. They did deny the resurrection of Jesus Christ, a fact Peter had boldly affirmed in their presence; and the conclusion must be allowed that the resurrection of Christ was in the

same category as the healing of the impotent man before them. They could not deny it!

“Began to confer with one another . . .” Commentators who raise a question as to how Luke knew what is revealed here overlook two things, (1) the Holy Spirit’s guidance of the inspired evangelist, and (2) the fact that many of the Pharisees obeyed the gospel and had long been faithful Christians at the time of Luke’s probable interview of them. (Acts 6:1; 15:5) We may be certain that what is here related occurred exactly as it is written. Therefore, it is not necessary as did F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 103 to suggest that “The decision by the Sanhedrin in the absence of Peter and John would be readily informed from what they said when Peter and John were brought back.”

J. W. McGarvey, *op. cit.*, p. 73 said the admissions of the Sanhedrin in these verses “show that in their public proceedings they had been utterly hypocritical and heartless. How they could now look one another in the face is a moral puzzle.”

Verse 17

Truth was no consideration to the Sanhedrin. They were determined to oppose the teaching of the apostles, and the best thing they could think of, at the moment, was to threaten them. That failing, they were prepared to use methods of violence; but the popularity of the new faith made the murder of the Twelve inexpedient at the moment.

Verses 18-19

This same Sanhedrin had once hailed the man born blind before the council; and throughout the proceedings the name of Jesus was not mentioned, in all probability because they had forbidden it; but Peter and John had boldly flaunted the name of Jesus before them, and their strategy here was to impose upon the holy apostles the same restriction they had for a while imposed upon the man born blind.

The reply of the apostles served fair notice that the old strategy would no longer work. It was a new day, and the gospel of Jesus Christ would be preached if all hell barred the way.

H. Leo Boles, op. cit., p. 70 said, “The original conveys the idea that they were not to let the name of Jesus pass their lips again;” but these men would persevere unto death, shouting that Jesus is risen from the dead; Jesus is Lord of all; there is salvation in no other name under heaven; Jesus is coming again, etc.

Verse 20

Albert Barnes, op. cit., p. 83 and 84 said this verse proved that “The responsibility of men for their religious opinions is direct to God, and that other men have no power of control.” It also indicates that “Men have a right to private judgment in matters of religion, subject only to God.”

Verses 21-22

“Threatened them further . . .” These were not idle threats. Later, the apostles were arrested and beaten (5:17-40); and still later, Stephen was stoned to death for preaching the gospel (6:8-7; 60). There is a progression in this inspired history toward that murderous fury which at last signaled official Israel’s total rejection of Jesus Christ. For the moment, the popularity of the apostles with the people prevented all but the threats.

“More than forty years old . . .” Luke added this bit of information regarding the age of the man who was healed, making the marvel of the miracle all the greater.

Verse 23

Having been threatened by the hierarchy, the apostles might have been expected, by those who threatened, to flee from the area; but instead, they, together with the whole Christian community, went to their knees in prayer to Almighty God. No, they would not flee—yet. The battle for the soul of secular Israel would be continued for forty years; then the Christians would flee from Jerusalem, and accumulated wrath of centuries would humble forever that city which rejected Jesus.

Verse 24

The Christians met the crisis through resorting to prayer, and the prayer here recorded is remarkable in several particulars.

"With one accord . . ." This expression occurs eleven times in Acts, and only once elsewhere in the New Testament. (Romans 15:6) It stresses the unity of the Lord's followers, and thus reveals one of the great secrets of the success of Christianity during those first years.

"O Lord . . ." The holy reverence of prayers recorded in the Bible is notable and, in all ages, a loss of reverence in prayers has proved to be a loss of effectiveness. "Lord" in this place is from the Greek term meaning "Master" and coupled with the reference to creation, it has the force of acknowledging God's unlimited power over all that He made. A. C. Hervey, *op. cit.*, p. 125 said, "The church in danger finds support and solace in the thought of God's absolute sovereignty."

Verses 25-26

Plainly taught here is the fact that the early disciples regarded the Psalms as inspired; and, to them, inspiration was not mere genius, or literary skill, or prudent foresightedness; it was an impartation of the Holy Spirit which endowed the author of scripture. Thus his words were true and accurate and His commands authoritative.

Verse 27

"The Holy Servant Jesus . . ." Certain critics have attempted to deny that Jesus identified Himself with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah; but as Archibald M. Hunter, *Introducing New Testament Theology*, p. 23 declared, "The key to most of the (NT) theology is in the Old Testament, especially in the Servant Songs of Isaiah and the seventh chapter of Daniel, Jesus clearly saw His Messianic ministry from Jordan to Golgotha, as a fulfilling of the prophecies of the Servant of the Lord."

Thus it is no surprise that in the very beginning of the gospel proclamation by the apostles strong emphasis upon the role of Jesus' sufferings would appear. Archibald M. Hunter, *Ibid.*, p. 37 said, "We find Peter four times in the early chapters of Acts (3:13, 26, 4:27, 30) calling Jesus "God's Servant." A little later, Philip expressly the Ethiopian eunuch that Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah 53 (Acts 8:26-40)"

The fulfillment of the prophecy from Psalm 2:1-2 as quoted in this prayer is declared by his verse. Herod and Pilate were representatives of kings and rulers who would oppose the Lord, and they were Gentiles. The implication, although not stated so bluntly, is that the Jewish religious leaders in the Sanhedrin were representatives of other rulers and of the children of Israel.

Regarding the question of why the mighty men such as rulers and kings and priests would with nearly unanimous hatred of the Christ unite their efforts to oppose and destroy Jesus and His teaching, the reason for it was deeply embedded in human nature. The Jewish rulers were mortified, disgusted, and outraged that one so poor and lowly would claim to be the Messiah. Their pride, ambition, and selfishness simply could not accept Jesus as the fulfillment of an expectation they had so long cherished of some spectacular leader on a white horse who would overthrow the power of Rome and restore, the defunct Solomon Empire.

In the case of the Romans, humans at last turned upon the new faith with the fury of a vicious animal; and, although at first not opposed to Christianity (because they did not understand it), when it finally became clear to Roman authorities that the new religion was not merely seeking a place along with other religions, but was exclusive in its claims, the Gentile authorities launched the great persecutions in the hope of exterminating Christianity.

Verse 28

This is the same problem on a cosmic scale that appears in the more limited instance of Judas' fulfilling prophecy by his betrayal of Jesus. Did God's foreordaining such rebellion against His authority become, in any sense, the cause of it? There are mysteries here beyond any complete human understanding of them; but any solution of the problem must take account of the freedom of the human will, either to obey or disobey God. Any resolution of the question that denies such freedom must be rejected.

In the case in hand, God desired the salvation of men through the death of Christ; but it was the wickedness of evil men which became an instrument of the real estate of which they were the possessors. Each one contributed a certain portion, but it is not said here that each one disposed of his whole property; we

are not even distinctly told that a single individual relinquished all that he owned, “foreordained” the sufferings and death of the Savior of the world. We may only bow the head and say with the incomparable Paul, “How unsearchable are His judgments, and unfathomable His ways.” (Romans 11:33)

Verse 29

The praying saints did not propose any solution, leaving the matter wholly in the hands of the Lord; but their petition was concerned with their own basic need of power to “speak the word with boldness.”

Verse 30

This was a petition that God would continue to perform the great signs and wonders such as the healing of the impotent man; but the apostles accurately read the connection between such signs and the preaching of the word; for, in the previous verse, they had prayed first that they themselves should not flinch in the proclamation of the truth.

Verse 31

“The place . . . was shaken . . .” God gave this visible sign that His promise of miraculous power to the Twelve would continue to be honored.

“Filled with the Holy Spirit . . .” This was not a repetition of the wonder at Pentecost, but a continuation in the apostles of the power “from on high” which had been promised, the result of which (their speaking the word with boldness) was also a proof of the purpose of such a gift.

Verse 32

This is not a reference to another manifestation of the event narrated in 2:43ff, but another reference to that same event, introduced here by Luke as preliminary to the happenings regarding Ananias and Sapphira. The custom of having all things common which began shortly after Pentecost had continued until the time of these events; but Luke’s reference to it here sheds new light upon it.

“The things which he possessed . . .” Thus it is clear that private property had not been abolished. What is taught here is not that the institution of

private possessions had been abolished, but that the Christians held their possessions not for themselves but as subject to the will of God in the use of them for the relief of the needy.

H. Leo Boles, *op. cit.*, p. 75 wrote, “This was an emergency, and all were willing and anxious to use whatever they possessed for the common good.”

In the fact of the “emergency” mentioned by Boles and so many others, there is a clue suggesting that all of the events mentioned thus far in Acts occurred within a very short space of time after Pentecost; because the most logical reason for any emergency, which is actually inferred rather than plainly stated, lies in the fact that vast throngs in Jerusalem for Pentecost, after obeying the gospel, continued to remain in Jerusalem for a time in order to hear the preaching of the apostles, and perhaps to aid in evangelism. Naturally, such a situation would terminate after a while; and the extreme generosity of the Christians prolonged it as long as possible.

Verses 33-35

“Abundant grace was upon them all . . .” The result of such overflowing generosity was that the effectiveness of the apostle’s message was multiplied, and what might be called a revival of the most fantastic proportions ensued.

“Owners of land or houses . . .” John Peter Lange, commentary on Acts, p. 81 observed, “We are authorized by the literal import of the text to assume that all the owners of real estate who belonged to the church, sold property, but not that they sold all the real estate of which they were the possessors. Each one contributed a certain portion, but it is not said here that each one disposed of His whole property; we are not even distinctly told that a single individual relinquished all that he owned.”

“Distributed to each, as any had need . . .” J. W. McGarvey, *op. cit.*, p. 80 noted, “This church was not at this time a commune, or a socialistic club, as many interpreters have fancied. There was no uniform distribution of the property of all among the members; neither was the property of all held and administered by the apostles.”

Upon Luke's first mention of this matter of "all things common: (Acts 2:43), the comment was made that it was the result of no clear commandment of either Christ or the apostles; and while this is true enough, there yet remains the overwhelming impact of this generosity of the first Christians as an example for the church of all ages; and we believe that McGarvey was correct in thus assessing the import of the events here recorded, J. W. McGarvey, *Ibid.*, said, "In reality this church was setting an example for all other churches in all times, by showing that true Christian benevolence requires that we shall not let our brethren in the church suffer for food, even if those of us who have houses and lands can prevent it only by the sale of our possessions. It teaches that we should share the last crust of bread with our brother."

The comment of Orin Root, *Acts*, p. 34 noted, "It was not a matter of providing for the whole church, but of supplying the needs of those who lacked." The scheme of having all things common was not long continued, nor is there any evidence that it became a policy of the apostolic church. W. R. Walker, *op. cit.*, p36-37 believed that the scheme did not originate with the apostles and that they permitted rather than encouraged it, stating that "the scheme was never tried elsewhere."

Sir William Ramsey, *Pictures of the Apostolic Church*, p. 29, pointed out that, "No universal selling of property is mentioned, and no general instructions were issued that members of the church ought to distribute to the poor all that they possessed. Many of the owners of property, on their own free will, from love of the brethren, used from time to time to sell their property and bring the proceeds to the apostles."

Verses 36-37

It should be noted that not a word is here given to the effect that Barnabas, "sold all that he had," there being no evidence at all that he did any such thing. Then, there is the further consideration that the sister of Barnabas, Mary, the mother of John Mark, appears in Acts chapter 12 as the owner of a large residence in Jerusalem, capable of housing a considerable portion of the church for a prayer meeting, the house having a courtyard and a gate which was attended by the serving girl, Rhoda. It was not the practice of those early

disciples to make a total liquidation of their assets in order to distribute all to the poor.

“Son of Exhortation . . .” contrasts with, “Son of Consolation,” even though both meanings are the same. “Barnabas . . .” This was the faithful and distinguished Christian who accompanied Paul on the first missionary journey.

Having related the example of the generosity of Barnabas, Luke would at once relate the story of Ananias and Sapphira and their ill-conceived scheme of imposing upon the Twelve apostles.

CHAPTER 5

This chapter recounts the tragic fall of Ananias and Sapphira (verse 1-11), the continued success and popularity of the apostolic mission (verse 12-16), the renewed opposition of the Sanhedrin, with another arraignment of the apostles before them (verse 17-32), the purpose of the Sanhedrin to slay the apostles thwarted by Gamaliel, and the beating of the Twelve by the Jewish authorities (verses 33-42).

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

Verse 1

“But . . .” This word clearly connects the event of Barnabas’ generous action which had just been narrated, with what ensues here. H. Leo Boles, Commentary on Acts, p. 77 noted, “The two illustrations here were intended to be brought in contrast, as the conjunction “but” introduces the sentence.”

“Ananias and Sapphira . . .” J. R. Dummelow, Commentary on the Holy Bible, p. 824 said, “The first of these names means “Jehovah hath been gracious,” and “If Sapphira is Greek, it means sapphire; if Aramaic, it means beautiful.”

How tragic is the contrast between these lovely names and what befell those who wore them. “Sold a piece of property . . .” This does not mean that they sold all that they had, or that they had been commanded to sell anything at all. The event about to be related was a dramatic change from the wonderful

miracles of mercy and healing which, until then, had marked the deeds of the apostles; but it was necessary that the severity of God, as well as His mercy, should be stressed.

Just as Jesus had withered the fig tree, there appeared here as Thomas Scott, Henry-Scott Commentary p. 447 wrote, “An instance of severity, following the instances of goodness. God is to be both loved and feared.”

J. R. Dummelow, op. cit., p. 825 wrote, “The truth of the narrative of Ananias and Sapphira is guaranteed by its painful character. No historian would have gone out of his way to invent it.”

Sir William M. Ramsey, Pictures of the Apostolic Church, p. 35 saw this narrative writing, “It is a moral apologue, not as invented to embody a moral, but as remembered because it did so.

Don D. Welt, Acts Made Actual, p. 73 was correct in making this wonder the first of a class writing, “We have witnessed in the past record the evil forces from without, but this chapter opens with the account of the first marks of the evil one within the fold.”

Verse 2

Albert Barnes, Notes on the New Testament, p. 93 wrote, “This means that they secretly kept back a part, while professedly devoting all to God.” Their sin was that of pretending to a degree of generosity higher than they actually possessed, a pretense which they had determined to support with falsehood. The excessive enormity of this sin, in context, was that it placed in jeopardy the entire Christian movement. John Peter Lange, Commentary on Acts, p. 85 said, “It involved the whole church in very great danger.”

The apostles of Christ, after their baptism in the Holy Spirit, were inspired men, able to perform miracles and to discern the thoughts of men. They claimed infallibility, as having been guided into all truth by the blessed Spirit in them; and, if such a fraud as that undertaken by Ananias and Sapphira had been successful, it would have discredited the central authority of God’s church upon the earth. The sale of a piece of land, as well as the price paid and received, could not long have been concealed, since such things have been in

the public records of every generation; and if the deception had succeeded, the word of the apostles themselves would have been suspect.

Verse 3

H. Leo Boles, *op. cit.*, p. 78 said, “This is the first sins recorded against any member of the church.” “Why has Satan filled your heart to lie . . . ?” The malignant personality of the evil one is affirmed by this apostolic question; but it should be noted that, although instigated by Satan, the sin was still reckoned as the responsibility of Ananias. Thus temptation is not an excuse for yielding to evil desires.

Note also that the sin was not in keeping back part of the price of the land, but in his doing so while pretending that he was giving all of it to the work of the Lord. Both of these facts were pointed out by Peter in the very next verse.

“To lie to the Holy Spirit . . .” How was it that this sin was a lie to the Holy Spirit? Thomas Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 87 said, “It is true that Ananias laid his money at the feet of the apostles. But he had not these alone in view at the time; he intended to influence the opinion and judgment of the whole church; and the Holy Spirit dwells in the whole church.”

Verse 4

There was no compulsion whatever upon Ananias, either to sell his land or to give the money afterward. Albert Barnes, *op. cit.*, p. 94 expressed it, “This verse proves that there was no obligation imposed on the disciples to sell their property; those who did it did it voluntarily.”

Peter’s rebuke of Ananias was administered in the Holy spirit; and there is not the slightest hint that Peter struck Ananias dead, or even that God had told Peter that such a thing would occur.

We must disagree with all those commentators who, like F. F. Barnes, *op. cit.*, p. 112, who seem to be outraged by the marvel of this double death. He said, “Try how we may, we cannot imagine Christ acting toward sinners as St. Peter is here represented as doing.”

Well, why not? Did not Christ say of Himself, and represent Himself as saying, “But these enemies of Mine, who did not want Me to reign over them, bring them here, and slay them in My presence.” (Luke 19:27)

Men simply do not like to think of God or Christ as a being whom they should fear; and such a narrative as this was designed to correct such an inadequate conception of deity.

Verse 5

This sudden physical death of Ananias and his wife (a little later) has been taken by some to imply also their loss eternally. F. F. Bruce, *Ibid.*, p. 114, said, “It may have been an act of mercy as well, if we think of the incident in the light of Paul’s words about another offender against the Christian community, “Deliver such a one unto the destruction of the flesh, that the Spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” (1 Corinthians 5:5)

Those who view this act of Divine judgment against this couple as some kind of vindictive and spiteful punishment inflicted by the apostle Peter are totally wrong. It was not Peter, but God, who executed this extreme penalty; and the contrast of it with the longsuffering and forbearance of the Father concerning the sins of the whole race leads to the conclusion that there were the most weighty reasons for what God did here.

“Great fear came upon all . . .” Many no doubt had been tempted like Ananias and Sapphira to pretend a holiness they did not possess; and this sudden judgment led to the widespread conclusion among them to the effect that, “There but for the grace of God go I.”

This Divine act, therefore, had the consequence of impressing upon them the young church the awful consequences of sin, and of warning non-Christians of the danger of associating themselves with the new and popular movement for purely selfish motives. This great fear upon both Christians and outsiders was “precisely the effect desired.” (J. W. McGarvey, *op. cit.*, p. 85)

Verse 6

The natural thing, upon the death of Ananias, would have been the seeking and informing of his wife; but no such amenity was permitted. The apostles

accepted the occurrence as a Divine judgment against sin, remembering no doubt that as B. W. Johnson, *The New Testament with Explanatory Notes*, p. 434 said that, “Severe examples had also occurred,” in the days of Moses, as in the case of Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1-2), and of Achan (Joshua 7:16-25).

Verses 7-8

The Divine judgment must have shocked and surprised Peter, in the case of Ananias, he could not have been aware of the judgment that wonderful Sapphira in case she was guilty. What a dreadful fear must have fallen upon the assembly as Sapphira made her entry. Sir William Ramsay, *op. cit.*, p. 33 wrote, “Can you imagine the silence as the examination proceeded.” Her unhesitating reply proved they had conspired together.”

“Sold the land . . .” This is the first intimation that identifies the property sold as “land.” Sir William Ramsay, *op. cit.*, p. 33 observed, “The whole circumstances are not explained at the outset. The reader learns them piecemeal, as the spectators learned them. Such an account is clearly marked as resting on eyewitness. We have a real occurrence remembered and described as it happened.”

Verse 9

Peter knew that the same penalty of death which befell Ananias would also fall upon Sapphira; and the timing of the young men’s return from the burial of Ananias further confirmed Peter’s certainty of what would ensue.

“Spirit of the Lord to the test . . .” It is significant that three different expressions appear in this narrative as being synonymous: (1) Lie to the Holy Spirit . . . verse 3, (2) “Not lied to men but to God . . . verse 4, and (3) the Spirit of the Lord to the test . . . verse 9.

Verses 10-11

The proper understanding of these verses was outlined by J. W. McGarvey, *op. cit.*, p. 86 saying, “We regard death, like that of her husband wrought independently of the power lodged in the apostle; and it seems to have been so regarded by the authorities in Jerusalem . . . no charge of murder was preferred, as might have been the case if the act had been understood differently.”

“Great fear came upon the whole church . . .” F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 116 said, “The occurrence of the word “church” is its first occurrence in the original text of Acts.”

The fear, mentioned twice in this narrative, came not only upon Christians, but upon all who heard what had happened. J. R. Dummelow, *op. cit.*, p. 82 is among those writers who are unwilling to accept a judgment of eternal damnation upon this unfortunate couple. He said, “It is not necessary to suppose that Ananias and Sapphira were eternally lost. After this terrible punishment, they may have been forgiven.” However, this writer believes that such a speculation is dangerous. It is best to leave unresolved those questions upon which there is not a clear word from the Lord.

SUCCESS OF THE APOSTOLIC MISSION

Verse 12

Two results of the utmost importance came from the mighty signs and wonders done by the Twelve, these being (1) their power and authority were vastly strengthened; and (2) the forward thrust of Christianity was greatly augmented. A. C. Hervey, *The Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 18, p. 158, noted that the miracles were wrought “exclusively by the hands of the apostles.”

Verse 13

“The rest . . .” refers to the non-Christian community, who, although afraid to unite with the community of faith, nevertheless praised and lauded the holiness preached and practiced among them.

“Dared to associate with them . . .” This makes “joining the church” a scriptural phrase, as further corroborated by Acts 9:26. A. C. Hervey, *Ibid* said that, “The expression “join himself” (associate with them) occurs ten times in the New Testament, of which seven are in Luke or the book of Acts.”

Verse 14

“Multitudes of men and women . . .” From the very first, the church operated upon the principles later enunciated by Paul, “That there is neither male or female in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28) Orin Root, *Acts*, p. 37 noted,

“The membership in the apostolic church was of adult believers exclusively; children below the age of responsibility could be neither “believers” nor “men and women.”

Verse 15

The sacred author does not tell us that any people upon whom Peter’s shadow fell were healed; and from this it would appear that the purpose of including this is to emphasize the overwhelming popularity that attached to the Twelve.

Adam Clarke, Commentary on the Whole Bible, Vol. V, p. 717 took the view that, “I cannot see all the miraculous influence here that others profess to see. It does not appear that the persons who thus thought and acted were converts already made to the faith of Christ; nor does it appear that any person was healed in this way.”

Verse 16

“Everyone . . .” There were no failures among the cures wrought by the Twelve, thus making it clear that the phenomenon in view here was in no manner akin to the faith healing crusades of our own day, in which failure is their principal feature and the “cure” is always questionable.

OPPOSITION OF THE SADDUCEES

Verses 17-18

Alexander Campbell, Acts of Apostles, p. 33 said, “The Sadducees saw in Christ’s resurrection the refutation of their system; and therefore they violently seized the apostles, because their preaching that doctrine was fatal to their distinguishing tenets.” “Put them in a public jail . . .” has the meaning of “put them in the common jail.”

Verses 19-20

“An angel of the Lord . . .” This is another of the supernatural wonders that attended the inception of Christianity. Jesus had promised that He would be “with you” always, even unto the end of the world.” (Matthew 28:20); and of course He was. All of the powers of hell would be frustrated in the establishment of the true faith on earth.

“The whole message of this life . . .” This means all the words relative to the eternal life in Jesus Christ. A similar meaning is in John 6:68, in which is recorded Peter’s words, “You have words of eternal life.”

E. H. Plumptre, Elliott’s Commentary, Acts, p. 29 said, “The “life in Christ” which the apostles preach is that eternal life which consists in knowing God (John 17:1), and in which the angels are sharers.”

Verse 21

“They entered . . . and taught . . .” “The council and the Senate . . .” John William Russell, Compact Commentary on the New Testament, p. 29 seems the best explanation of this unusual word “senate,” he said, “Some scholars have suggested that “senate of the children of Israel” was added by Luke for the benefit of Theophilus to whom he wrote and who, though a Roman official was probably a Greek by birth and would more readily understand the nature of the Jewish Sanhedrin by speaking of it as a “senate.”

The words “council” and “senate” are synonyms of “Sanhedrin.” Others suppose that the reference is to a group of elders, or leading citizens, who were associated with the Sanhedrin on special occasions in the decision of unusually heavy matters; but nothing of this kind is mentioned in the Scriptures.

The particular session in view here, however, was to be the occasion of quite a surprise. One many only imagine the discomfiture of the high priest upon sending for the prisoners to learn, that they had escaped the maximum security prison.

The purpose of the angelic rescue of the Twelve from prison was in no wise connected with their personal safety; for the angel’s directive still left them vulnerable to the persecution of the priests. It must be concluded, then, that the purpose of their release was to procure the continuation of their preaching of the word of God to the people.

Verses 22-24

W. R. Walker, op. cit., p. 45 said, “Sign after sign was given the hard-hearted leaders of Israel, but they remained adamant.” Under the circumstances, they

could not have failed to know that God was with the apostles of Christ, but they were determined to carry forward their opposition.

“Perplexed . . .” The reason for this perplexity does not seem to be any doubt of how the apostles escaped, but rather a perplexity regarding the rapid spreading of the kingdom, which had already grown far beyond anything they could have thought possible. It seems to have been utterly beyond their comprehension that God would remove their whole nation rather than allow them permanently to block the world-wide proclamation of the faith in Christ.

Verses 25-27

“They stone them . . .” The popularity of the new faith was such, at the moment, that the Sadducean priests simply did not dare to rouse the anger of the Jerusalem mob. It is not to be thought that the Christians would have stoned the officers, although some of the new converts might have joined in such a resistance, but rather that the non-Christians whose sympathies were all with the disciples might have broken into violence if provoked.

Verse 28

“In this name . . .” It is nearly incredible, the hatred which the Jewish religious hierarchy had for the blessed name of Jesus, which name they simply would not pronounce under any circumstances, saying “this name,” as here, instead, and always referring to Him as “this man” or “that man.”

In this narrative of the apostles’ escape from prison, just related, some critics have found what they believe to be a somewhat stereotyped “form” of such escape episodes in ancient classical literature, claiming from this, of course, that the episode before us is questionable. However, the form-critical approach to the New Testament is by far the weakest criticism ever alleged against it, being totally unworthy of a particular attention. F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 120 warned, “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 shape is the least important consideration in comparing the two kinds of pies!”

“Bring this man’s blood upon us . . .” What a monstrous protest was this! These were the men who screamed, “His blood be upon us and upon our children!” but now they are unwilling to face the guilt they incurred. Thomas Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 450 noted, “See how those who with presumption will do an evil thing, yet cannot bear to hear of it afterward, or to have it charged upon them. They could cry daringly enough, “His blood be on us; but now they take it as a heinous affront to have Christ’s blood laid upon them.” (Thomas Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 450.)

Verse 29

There was no device by which the powerful priestly enemies of the Lord and His apostles could intimidate the witnesses of His resurrection. They were here bluntly told by the apostles that they were subject to God’s orders, rather than to the Sanhedrin’s prejudice.

Verse 30

In this verse appears another instance of Peter’s speeches, as recorded by Luke, stressing the same thought and expressing it in terminology similar to that in Peter’s epistles. (1 Peter 2:24)

Archibald M. Hunter, *Introducing New Testament Theology*, p. 74 wrote, “Twice in Acts 5:30 and 10:39 Jesus’ death is significantly called “hanging on a tree.” This phrase points back to the Jewish belief that a man “hanged on a tree” was a man “accursed by God” (Deuteronomy 21:22f). Anyone who so described Christ’s death had not only seen the “scandal” of the cross but had somehow divined that He bore the cross for others.”

Don De Welt, *op. cit.*, p. 81 pointed out that Peter’s speech here has the effect of replying to the Sadducees’ protest in verse 28 against bringing “this man’s blood upon us,” and carries the meaning of, “We intended to convey the thought that the blood of Jesus is upon your heads; for you slew Him and hanged Him on a tree.”

Verse 31

J. W. McGarvey, *op. cit.*, p.95 wrote, “It is implied that repentance as well as remission of sins is a gift; but to give repentance cannot mean to bestow it

without an exercise of our own will ; for repentance itself is an act of our will.” “Repentance to Israel . . .” This statement that Israel needed to repent was totally unacceptable to the Sanhedrin. That they, the religious leaders of the people, needed to repent was preposterous in their eyes.”

W. R. Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 47 said, “They were as much incensed as a body of bishops would be today, if the same charge should be made against them. They had absolute confidence that their descent from Abraham guaranteed them complete possession of every promise of the Old Testament.”

“Prince and a Savior . . .” The word “prince” has the meaning of “Author,” as in the “Author of eternal life,” being the same word as in Acts 3:15.

Verse 32

In the history of holy truth, there has never been any such thing as God’s giving the Holy Spirit to men in order to make them obedient, or to make them sons, or to save them, or to procure the remission of sins, or any such thing. On Pentecost, Peter had commanded believers to repent and be baptized with the promise that those who did so, receiving the remission of their sins subsequently to their obeying those commands would also receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. “Obey,” as used here, indicates that “a lifelong obedience to God” was a continuing condition to be fulfilled by those desiring to enjoy the continuing gift of the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 4:6 declares that the Holy Spirit is given to men, not to make them sons, but as a consequence of their already being sons. The popular notion to the effect that God sends the Holy Spirit with the purpose of making men desire to serve God is totally wrong.

GAMALIEL CHAMPIONS THE APOSTOLIC CAUSE

Verse 33

On Pentecost the people were pricked in the heart, which means they believed; and here the priests were cut to the heart, which means they were infuriated and filled with murderous thoughts.

Verse 34

Regarding Gamaliel, Everett J. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 401 wrote, “Josephus the Jewish historian tells us that the party of the Pharisees was small in number but commanded such popularity and influence among the people that the Sadducees dared not take any action that the Pharisees opposed. The influence of Gamaliel’s advice reflects that situation.”

Gamaliel himself was a man of heroic stature among the Jews of that generation. Saul of Tarsus had been his pupil (Acts 22:3); and he was widely hailed as the greatest teacher of the Law in his day. “He is said to have died eighteen years after Jerusalem was destroyed, and that he died, as he had lived, a Pharisee.” (Albert Barnes, *op. cit.*, p. 104)

It is a mistake to view Gamaliel as any true friend of the apostles, his advice in the instance before us being founded utterly upon policy, rather than upon any belief of the truth which the apostles proclaimed.

Verses 35-36

“Theudas . . .” The point of Gamaliel’s appeal to the example of Theudas was simply that God did not bless his efforts and that all came to naught, with the application that without God’s blessing, the work of the apostles would also fail. He then gave another example of the same thing.

Verse 37

Judas . . .” was said to have been “of Galilee,” because that was the seat of his insurrection against Rome. “Days of the census . . .” Gamaliel mentioned this because Judas “was the leader of the Jewish uprising which opposed the census ordered by Augustus, after the deposition of Archelaus.” (A. C. Hervey, *op. cit.*, p. 162) The enrollment here, as well as the one that led to Joseph and Mary’s trip to Bethlehem, was also carried out by Quirinius. The point, exactly like that in the narration about Theudas, was that God did not bless the insurrection; and, therefore, it failed.

Verses 38-39

As John Peter Lange, *op. cit.*, p. 101 pointed out, “The counsel of Gamaliel may prove wise or unwise, depending upon the circumstances of its application.

Thus:

- I. It is unwise:
 - A. If it made an excuse for judging purely upon the basis of what succeeds or fails, or
 - B. It made an excuse for deferring a decision that should be made immediately.
- II. It is wise:
 - A. If it is used to inculcate humility in the judgment of others, or
 - B. If it leads to the gentle treatment of those who differ from us in matters of judgment.

In the present instance, God used the counsel of Gamaliel to blunt the murderous intention of the Sanhedrin.

Verse 40

“They flogged them . . .” There was nothing mild about such a punishment. They were brutally beaten with “forty stripes save one, a penalty inflicted upon Paul five times. (2 Corinthians 11:24) The excuse for such punishment was the apostles’ disobedience of the Sanhedrin’s injunction against teaching in the name of Jesus, an injunction they issued once more in connection with the punishment.

The fierce Sadducees would have resorted to murder, except for the danger of alienating the Pharisees; and thus it may not be supposed that they were impressed with Gamaliel’s suggestion that they might be fighting against God. Gamaliel’s speech, under the circumstances, John William Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 295 said, “This was little less than a guarded admission of the truth.” But the concern of the Sadducees did not relate to what was true, but to what was popular, or expedient.

Verses 41-42

“Rejoicing . . .” What a remarkable occasion for rejoicing was this! It was coming to pass exactly as Jesus had prophesied saying, “They will deliver you up to councils, and in their synagogues they will scourge you . . . and you shall be hated of all men for My name’s sake. (Matthew 10:17, 22)

“His Name . . .” means the name of Christ and is here used for the whole corpus of the New Testament teaching regarding salvation in His holy name. “They kept right on teaching and preaching . . .” Preaching is “public” teaching; this distinction appearing here in the words “in the temple and at home.” They taught privately and in homes where they had opportunity; but they also proclaimed publicly in the temple the wonderful message of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 6

This very short chapter narrates the preliminaries of Stephen’s martyrdom. His rise to prominence was a result of his appointment as one of the seven chosen to administer the distribution of food to the needy, an appointment brought about by complaints of neglecting the Grecian widows (verses 2-7), and that his popularity, ability in debate, and fearless proclamation of the truth resulted in a Pharisaical plot against him, leading to his arrest (verse 8-15).

Many things of very great significance come to view in this little chapter: there was the first instance of the laying on of the hands of the apostles; there appeared the first violent oppression of the Pharisees; there occurred the first expansion of the church’s organization beyond that of the governing apostles; there was a second threat to the unity of the disciples, deriving from the allegations of neglect of a certain class receiving charity; and there was the exceedingly significant record of “ a great company of priests” accepting the faith in Jesus Christ.

Verse 1

“At this time . . .” indicates a considerable time-lapse after the establishment of the church in A. D. 30, probably a period of six to eight years. “A complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews . . .” Both

classes of these “Jews” were Christians, but there was a language barrier. The Jews of Palestine spoke Aramaic, and those of the Diaspora spoke Greek, many of the latter were living in Jerusalem at that time but were natives of the provinces.

F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* p. 128 wrote, “In the Jewish world as a whole there was some, and this survived between two groups,” even after they became Christians. “Widows were being overlooked . . .” Most scholars assume that there was justification for this action, basing their opinion upon the assumption that the Grecian widows were actually “neglected.”

It is not clear from this verse that Luke intended any admission of that effect; but neither is it denied. It is this word “complaint” or as some versions say, “murmuring” which casts some doubt on the extent of that “neglect,” for “complaining” or “murmuring” almost invariably carries with it an imputation of guilt in the persons doing the complaining; and it rarely implies any guilt in those complained or murmured against.

Charles H. Spurgeon, *Sermons*, Vol. IX, p. 389 said of the murmuring of Israel in the wilderness, “The tendency of human nature is to murmur, complain, find fault, a very easy thing to do, the very word “murmur” being made of two infantile sounds—murmur! There is no sense in it, no wit in it, no thought in it, being the cry rather of a brute than of a man, just a double groan!”

Note: The vice of murmuring or “grumbling” is specifically condemned in *Philippians 2:14* and *1 Corinthians 10:10*. The apostles spoke not a word of blame regarding either those who murmured or grumbled or those who had done the distributing. They simply changed the administration of the charities with a view to eliminating all further excuse for an murmuring.

“Their widows . . .” J. W. McGarvey, *Commentary on Acts*, p. 103 wrote, “The fact that this distribution was made daily, and that the widows were the principal recipients, confirms our former conclusions that there was no general equalization of property, but only a provision for the needy.”

E. A. Elam, *Elam’s Notes on Bible School Lessons*, p. 191 said, “There may be only two classes in the church, namely the givers and the receivers. Each one

belongs to one of these classes. If one is unable to give, that one is in the class of receivers and needs to be given to.”

Verse 2

“The Twelve . . . “ H. Leo Boles, Commentary on Acts, p. 95 said, “It shows that Matthias was one of the apostles, for it would take him to complete the list of the twelve.” “It is not desirable for us to neglect . . . to serve tables . . .” The word “serve” has the meaning of “minister to,” and is rendered from the Greek word diakonia, a derivative from diakonos, the latter term being rendered, “by three English words in our version: minister, servant, and deacon.”

The men here were not assistants to elders of the church, but to the Twelve; and furthermore, they were endowed by a laying on of the hands of the apostles.

Verse 3

The traditional deductions from this episode, namely (1) that the men here appointed were installed in the office of deacon, and (2) that the work of deacons is restricted to the church’s “business” affairs, are by no means necessary.

J. W. McGarvey, op. cit., p. 107 was sure that, “The deacon’s office was here first created and supplied with incumbents;” and “that no ingenuity of argument can evade the conclusion that this gives the authority of apostolic precedent for the popular election of church officers.” (Ibid, p. 104)

However, the Seven were not “elected” at all; they were “appointed” by the apostles. Therefore, to the extent of this episode’s application to “church officers,” it is the right of nominating elders and deacons which is vested in the congregation, rather than the right of election or appointment of such officers.

Neither apostles nor elders can rule any congregation without taking into account the considered judgment of its membership.

Verse 4

“Devout ourselves . . .” What the apostles here proposed was to “devout” or “continue steadfastly” as they had already been doing, namely, devoting their total resources to the propagation of the truth.

“The ministry of the word . . .” Nothing is any plainer in the New Testament than the priority of the word and doctrine of Christ over every other consideration, even that of taking care of the poor. Neither area of responsibility is to be neglected, but the first duty is that of ministering the word itself.

Verse 5

“Stephen . . .” is mentioned first, as Luke’s narrative was about to recount his martyrdom. The qualifications that he had as a man of faith and full of the Holy Spirit were not his alone but belonged to all of the group nominated by the multitude.

“Philip . . .” Concerning this nominee, B. W. Johnson, *Notes on the New Testament*, p. 439 said, “He was distinguished as “Philip the Evangelist.” He gave the gospel to Samaria, converted the eunuch, and afterward lived and labored at Caesarea. (Acts 21:8)”

“Nicolaus . . .” First, he is the only one designated a proselyte, and the only one whose native city is given, the latter fact calling forth this comment from F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 129 who wrote, “That the only member of the Seven to have his place of origin named should belong to Antioch—Syrian Antioch, of course, is a mark of Luke’s special interest in that city; and this helps to confirm the tradition that he himself was an Antiochene.”

Two of the Ante-Nicene writers connected the name of Nicolaus with the heresy named in Revelation 2:6. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies in Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. I, p. 352 wrote, “The Nicolaitanes are the followers of that Nicolaus who was one of the seven first ordained to the diaconate by the apostles. They lead lives of unrestrained indulgence . . . teaching that it is a matter of indifference to practice adultery, and to eat things sacrificed to idols.”

Of course, it is no greater wonder that one of the Seven should have proved to be unworthy than that one of the Twelve should have been a traitor.

Nevertheless, serious doubt is cast upon Irenaeus’s charge of heresy against Nicolaus, it being far more likely that a group of sinners pretending to be his followers adopted his name in an effort to further their evil teaching, as it appears in this comment on Revelation.

In Victorious, Commentary on Revelation 2:6. Vol. II, p. 346 in his comment on Revelation 2:6, he said, “The Nicolaitanes were in that time false and troublesome men, who, as ministers under the name of Nicolaus, had made for themselves a heresy . . . etc.”

E. A. Elam, op. cit., p. 190 said, “Some Greek scholars assume that all seven were members of the dissenting or complaining party.” John Peter Lange, Commentary on Acts, p. 105 thought it probable that “some of the seven were Hebrews” with Greek names; and H. Leo Boles, op. cit., p. 97 noted that some think that, “Three of the seven were Hebrews, three Grecians, and one a proselyte!” It is pretty obvious that we simply do not know.

Verse 6

“They laid their hands on them . . .” The Seven were already “full of the Holy Spirit” in the sense ordinary; and therefore something more is intended here. Luke himself connected the laying on of the apostles’ hands with the gift extraordinary of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:18); and coupled with Luke’s statement as moments later that one of the Seven did “great wonders and signs among the people (verse 8). The teaching appears to be that the apostles here endowed the Seven with miraculous powers. To view laying on of hands as a mere ceremony of ordination is incorrect.

Verse 7

“Increase greatly . . .” At a number of places in Acts, Luke paused to note the continued success of the gospel. The priests were becoming obedient to the faith . . .” Only here is there such a declaration in the New Testament, and the importance of the truth revealed here is superlative. First of all, here is the secret of all those episodes which took place in the homes of the Pharisees, as given in Luke, there being no good reason to doubt that Luke interviewed many of those converted priests; and this student views this as by far the most likely and reasonable explanation of chapters 10-19 in Luke’s gospel.

In the second place, the conversion of a vast number of Pharisees would account for the savage persecution of the church by that same party, which persecution Luke was in the act of narrating.

The success of the gospel, however, in bringing many priests of the old order into the church was not an unmixed blessing. The presence of such a group would tend to meld the old and the new institutions, a melding that was contrary to God's will; and in this, one may read the necessity for the Divine interposition which scattered the young church from Jerusalem.

"Obedient to the faith . . ." Here is another outcropping of that fundamental fact of the New Testament, making "faith" not a subjective thing at all but an objective obedience of the gospel commandments. Don De Welt, *Acts Made Actual*, p. 86 said, "We must not overlook the expression, "Obedient to the faith." There was something more to their faith than mere mental ascent; there was something in it that demanded obedience . . . repentance and baptism . . . for the remission of sins."

J. W. McGarvey, *op. cit.*, p.110 said, "This obedience is rendered not by believing; for that is to exercise the faith, not to obey it." Wherever faith is mentioned in the New Testament as the basis of God's forgiveness, remission of sins, or justification, it is invariably an "obedient faith" which is meant. (Romans 1:5 and 16:26)

Verse 8

No record of specific signs has come down to us; but the fact of their designation here as "great" proves them to have been miracles of the first magnitude. Stephen was a man of the most notable character and of the mightiest ability. G. B. F. Hallock, *Doran's Ministers Manual*, p. 579 said Stephen was, "The morning star who ushered in the dawn of St. Paul's ministry!" Orin root, *Acts*, p. 44 said this verse is, "The first indication of miracles worked by any (of our Lord's followers) except the apostles of the Lord Jesus."

Even these signs, however, were no done apart from the apostles, because it was through the laying on of their hands that Stephen had received such powers.

Verses 9-10

"Synagogue . . ." used here in the singular appears to be the designation of a single place frequented by the various persons mentioned; but the existence of so many synagogues in Jerusalem at the time, G. B. F. Hallock, *op. cit.*, p. 579 says, "There were four hundred and eighty" has led some to suppose that two or

more synagogues are in view here; but J. W. McGarvey, op. cit., p. 112 was right in viewing the question as “of no special importance.”

“Freedmen . . .” The members of this group had once been slaves, but had received their liberty. A great many of the Christians in those early years were slaves, the same being indicated by their names as given in Romans 16th chapter; but the “Freedmen” had been freed.

“Unable to cope with the wisdom . . .” It is rather remarkable that wisdom should have been ascribed to Stephen, in view of the fact that in the gospels it is attributed to our Lord (Matthew 13:54) and mentioned as belonging to Solomon (Matthew 12:42). E. H. Plumptre, op. cit., p. 36 wrote, “It implies something higher even than the ‘consolation’ from which Barnabas took his name.” It was this great wisdom of Stephen that enabled him completely to vanquish all opponents of the truth he proclaimed.

Verse 11

“Secretly induced men . . .” Men do not need to be bribed to tell the truth; and the Pharisees’ money in view in this verse is proof enough that the testimony procured by it was false; but such is the mystery of evil that in every generation there must be champions of every lie Satan ever invented.

The lying charge that Stephen had blasphemed either God or Moses was unsupported by any fact whatever. As Don De welt, op. cit., p. 88 expressed it, “The accusation was nothing but a black lie;” and we might add that the falsity of the charges was matched by the deceit of the induced witnesses pretending to have “heard” Stephen say things, despite the probability that they had “heard” nothing at all, but were told what to say by the paymasters procuring the perjury. By definition, induced men” are “false witnesses.”

Verses 12-14

“To say . . .” that Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place . . .” This was a lie in that neither our Lord nor Stephen ever declared that He, Christ, would destroy the temple; what Jesus actually said was that they the religious leaders would destroy it, that is, the temple of His body, the same having no reference at all to the secular temple of the Jews. At that same moment, Jesus promised that He would “raise it up” (the temple of His body in three days). (John 2:19-22)

Jesus indeed prophesied the destruction of the temple, promising not that He Himself would destroy it, but affirming that, “The king (God) would send His armies (those of the Romans) and destroy those murderers and burn their city.” (Matthew 22:7)

“Alter the customs . . .” Only malignant spite could construe Stephen’s preaching the very changes God Himself had promised in the Old Testament Scriptures as blasphemy, either of God or Moses.

The Pharisaical plot that led to the murder of Stephen was successful, whereas the opposition of the Sadducees had largely failed; and the circumstances that made it so were: (1) the Pharisees, by far more popular than the Sadducees, were the leaders, their engagement in the opposition deriving, in all probability, from the inroads the new faith had made upon their own party (verse 7); (2) They directed their murderous purpose not against the, Twelve, but against a prominent new personality but recently elevated to popular esteem; (3) it was directed against a single individual, not against a group; (4) they stoned him on the spot, not bothering to procure a verdict; it was exactly the same kind of vicious murder they unsuccessfully to perpetrate against Christ Himself.

The action of the Sanhedrin in this murder was totally illegal, being contrary to the laws of both of Rome and of the Hebrews; and yet it succeeded in their objective of killing their intended victim whose arguments they were unable to answer.

Over and beyond the circumstances named above, it was time, in the will of God, for the church to be scattered; and, therefore, God here permitted what He had not permitted before.

Verse 15

Saul of Tarsus was in that council, and it is a most reasonable conjecture that he reported, this phenomenon to Luke. John Peter Lange, *op. cit.*, p. 110 said, “It obviously describes an objective, and, indeed an extraordinary phenomenon.”

Whatever it was, Paul never forgot it; nor could he ever erase from his memory the sorrow of the tragic day when the first martyr of the Christian religion sealed his faith with his blood.

CHAPTER 7

This great chapter is taken up entirely by the account of Stephen's so-called defense before the Sanhedrin and his martyrdom which climaxed it. Actually, Stephen's address was not so much a defense as it was an epic survey of Jewish history as related to their rejection of the promised Messiah.

None of the so-called "contradictions," however, are of any importance; but a few of them will be noted for the purpose of showing the amazing weakness of such criticisms. Those great experts on Jewish history who sat in the Sanhedrin found no fault whatever with the history cited by Stephen; the only thing they objected to was his application of it!

STEPHEN'S ADDRESS

The name "Stephen" means "wreath" or "crown," and it is appropriate that the first to win the martyr's crown should have worn such a name.

The providence of God overruled the tragic event of Stephen's death (1) by making it the occasion for the scattering of the church which was so necessary in the Divine purpose, and (2) by accomplishing through it (in all probability) the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, the mightiest figure, apart from Christ, in the entire New Testament.

Verse 1

A. C. Hervey, *The Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 18, p. 214 thought that "the high priest at that time was Theophilus or Jonathan." Both being sons of Annas and both having held the office; but it appears that F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, p. 144 was probably more correct in saying that, "The high priest was probably still Caiaphas, at the trial of Jesus; he remained in office till A.D. 36." "Are these things so . . ." What a hypocritical question from the man who had bribed the witness to lie!

The best analysis of Stephen's speech seems to be that of F. F. Bruce *Ibid.*, p. 146, thus, "Stephen's historical survey reviews the history of the nation from the call of Abraham to the building of Solomon's temple. It concentrates on three main topics: (1) the patriarchal period (verse 2-16). (2) Moses and the law (verse 17-43), (3) the tabernacle and the temple (verse 44-50). The first of the three sections of this speech is an introduction to the central themes; the second deals

with the charge of blasphemy against Moses, the third with the charge of blasphemy against God. (Ibid, p. 145)

Verses 2-4

“Depart from your country. . .” The young church was about to be scattered; and it was timely for the speaker to focus upon the fact that the father of all faithful had also been called to get out of his native land and follow the call of the God of Glory. On that very day when Stephen spoke, countless numbers of the Christians would say goodbye to Jerusalem forever. Significantly God’s call of Abraham took place in a pagan land, not in Palestine.

Verses 5-8

“No inheritance in it . . .” John W. Haley, *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible*, p. 318 said, “The gift was not to Abraham personally, but to him as the founder and representative of the nation.” The only part of Palestine that Abraham ever owned was the cave of Machpelah which he purchased for a grave.

“Four hundred years . . .” Exodus 12:40-41, gives the time as 430 years: but “The four hundred years is a round number as in Genesis 15:13.” (A. C. Hervey, *op. cit.*, p. 216) Also, there were two ways of counting the “sojourning,” these being (1) from the call of Abraham to the Exodus which was 430 years, and (2) from the birth of Isaac to the Exodus which was 400 years.

Perhaps Stephen intended that his hearers should notice that even the covenant of circumcision was given long before Moses or the Law.

Verses 9-13

“Jealous of Joseph . . .” Stephen doubtless cited this an example of the Jew’s rejection of their heaven-sent believer, prefiguring the rejection of the Christ Himself; also, by his mention of Joseph’s being made known to the brethren at “the second time,” there is a hint that that the Jews will really learn who Christ is at the Second Advent.

Verses 14-16

“Seventy -five persons in all . . .” This number has been seized upon as a contradiction of Genesis 46:27 which gives the number as “70.” George DeHoff, *Alleged Bible Contradictions Explained*, p. 275 observed, “Jacob’s children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren amounted to sixty-six. (Gen. 46:8-26)

Adding Jacob himself and Joseph with his two sons, we have seventy. If to the

sixty-six we add the nine wives of Jacob's sons (Judah's and Simeon's wives were dead: and Joseph could hardly be said to call himself, his own wife or his two sons into Egypt, and Jacob is specifically separated by Stephen) we have seventy-five persons as in Acts."

Jewish genealogies did not regard women, or even count them; and such an attitude was noted during Jesus' public ministry, and for some time within the church itself, when, for example, the number partaking of the loaves and fishes was given as "five thousand men, besides the women and children," and when the number of disciples was stated as "five thousand men" (Acts 4:4) it was appropriate that in this inspired speech of Stephen the women should have been reckoned among the number going down into Egypt with Jacob.

"Tomb which Abraham had purchased . . ." This is said to contradict Joshua 24:32, where it is stated that "Jacob bought (a field) of the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem." However, George DeHoff, *Ibid.*, p. 232 pointed out, there were three separate transactions, "(1) Abraham bought a cave and field in which it stood. (Genesis 23:17) (2) Abraham bought another sepulchre, but it is not stated that he bought the field in which it stood. (Acts 7:15-16) (3) Years later, Jacob bought a parcel of ground (Joshua 24:32) or a parcel of a field. (Genesis 33:19) This was, in all probability, the very field in which Abraham's second sepulchre stood, as this field once belonged to the same owners though they may have been miles apart.

In all the Bible, nothing can be found to contradict any of these statements; and it is amazing to me that even some Christians make labored efforts to "harmonize the difficulties." I always ask, "What difficulties?"

Verses 17-22

Just as the Patriarchs had rejected Joseph the great deliverer who had saved the nation from starvation, Stephen would now show that the chosen people had also rejected Moses. Moses was exceedingly well qualified to be God's instrument of deliverance from bondage.

Stephen's eulogy of Moses fell far short of the extravagant claims usually made by the Jews with regard to the great lawgiver, some even claiming that he was the author of Egyptian civilization. The points here stressed are: (1) that Moses had been providently incorporated into the royal family of Egypt, (2) that

he was “exceeding fair,” and (3) that he had been provided with the very best education possible.

“He was lovely in the sight of God . . . “ John Peter Lange, Commentary on Acts, p. 119 said, “This phrase is intensive, rather than a mere equivalent for the superlative and means, ”lovely in the sight of God.” Coupled with the statement later that he was mighty “in words and works,” these expressions reveal Moses to have been a man of the most extraordinary power and ability. Even in his early childhood, Moses possessed remarkable ability and beauty. Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, p. 77 wrote, “It happened frequently, that those who met him as he was carried along the road, were obliged to turn again upon seeing the child; they left what they were about and stood a great while to look at him; for the beauty of the child was so remarkable and natural that it detained the spectators, and made them stay longer to look upon him.” Stephen was here presenting Moses as a type of Jesus our Lord, a principal factor of which was his rejection by the chosen people. “Power in words and deeds . . .” The meaning is that his achievements in every way were superlative.

Verses 23-27

“Who made you a ruler and judge . . . ?” There was a shocking parallel to this in the venomous question of the Sanhedrin who had rejected Christ in almost the same words, demanding, by what authority are You doing these things; or who gave You this authority to do these things?” (Mark 11:28) The point of Stephen’s message could hardly have escaped the bitter enemies to whom it was addressed.

In all of this, Stephen was tracing a pattern in Jewish behavior which would lead inevitably to the rejection of the Savior.

Verses 28-33

The significance here lies in the fact that God appeared to Moses in the pagan land of Midian, the “holy ground’ being neither in a temple nor in Jerusalem. “The voice of the Lord . . . “ A. C. Hervey, op. cit., p. 218 was correct in saying: “The Lord has only one voice.” (Not as some versions say “A voice . . . “)

Verses 34-37

It is amazing that Stephen should have been so completely filled with the knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Outstanding in this passage is the reference to the “prophet (Moses) like unto me.” (Deuteronomy 18:15f) This was proof of the typical nature of Moses and of his pointing forward to the Christ, with the admonition that Israel should “Hear Him” or suffer the penalty of being cut off from being God’s people. By this identification of his loyalty to Christ as being also loyalty to Moses and what Moses commanded, Stephen devastated any charge that he had blasphemed Moses. On the contrary, it was the Sanhedrin who were “blaspheming Moses” by their refusal to honor the words of Moses commanding them to receive and obey Christ.

Verses 38-40

“Congregation in the wilderness . . .” This is not a reference to the church of Christ, but to the congregation of Israel in the wilderness which is typical of Christ’s church. They had been baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea (1 Corinthians 10:2); and their testing during the wilderness wanderings was typical of the testing of Christians during their present probation.

F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 152 discerned this implication of Stephen’s words saying, “There in the wilderness Moses was guide to the people; there they were constituted the “*ecclesia*” (the called out of God); there they received the living oracles of God. What more could the people want? . . . and it was all theirs in the wilderness, far from the Promised Land and the holy city.”

“The living oracles . . . “ means, “the living word.”

Verses 31-43

This quotation is from Amos 5:25ff and was introduced here as a further comment by Stephen upon the apostasy of Israel; and although the outright rejection of God and the widespread idolatry during the period of the monarchy came much later, Stephen’s application of Amos’ prophecy shows that even during the period of the wilderness wanderings they had already rejected God in their hearts.

A. C. Hervey, *op. cit.*, p. 220 expressed it, “What Amos means to say is that because of the treacherous, unfaithful heart of Israel, as shown by the worship of the golden calf, and all their rebellions in the wilderness, all their sacrifices were worthless.”

“Moloch . . .” This old god of the Ammonites “was worshiped at Mari about 1800 B. C. and was associated with the sacrifice of children in the fire.” (The New Bible Dictionary, p. 836) Solomon built a high place for this god on a hill east of Jerusalem (1 Kings 11:7; Ahaz burned his children (2 Chronicles 28:3), and Manasseh did the same (2 Kings 21:6); and Samaria was judged for this sin (2 Kings 17:17).

“Rephan . . .” The New Bible Dictionary, Ibid., p. 1083 says, “This is the name of a god identified or connected with the planet Saturn.” Adam Clarke, Commentary on the Whole Bible, Vol, V, p. 732 says that, “Moloch was generally understood to mean the sun;” thus the declaration of Stephen that God “gave them up to serve the host of heaven” was accurate.

“God gave them up . . .” What Stephen here declared concerning Israel Paul also declared concerning the Gentiles. (Romans 1:14:28) God’s giving them up is not a passive judgment, but active. It means more than merely withdrawing from men that they may walk in their own lusts and includes a punitive judgment to the effect that those given up will reap the debauchery and degeneration which are the consequences of their rebellion.

In establishing the pattern of Israel’s repeated rejection of God, Stephen here brought into view the fact that not only had the ten northern tribes been lost entirely, but that even the southern remnant had been sent away into Babylon as punishment for their idolatry.

Verses 44-47

“According to the pattern which he had seen . . .” This additional inspired testimony regarding the “pattern,” that Moses had received from God and according to which he was commanded, he was to “make all things.” (Hebrews 8:5)

“Solomon built a house for Him . . .” When David’s conscience was aroused because of the luxury of his cedar paneled-palace contrasted with the tent-shrine that housed the ark of the covenant, the prophet Nathan made it clear to David that God did not want any temple built by him, but promised that a “son of David would arise and built a house of God. (2 Samuel 7)

Stephen’s short reference to the temple of Solomon shows dramatically that the very temple itself was only a substitute for the greater temple of Christ

Himself, typical of the latter to be sure, and like the monarchy itself, allowed indeed of God; but still only a substitute for the real temple, which is Christ. This was the great message of the Christ that “One greater than the temple is here.” (Matthew 12:6)

Stephen’s argument, then, is simply that Christ is the true temple, that “in Christ,” not in some building,” men are called to worship God.

Verses 48-50

Stephen summed up his argument by this appeal to the prophecy of Isaiah (66:1f), which set forth the impossibility of Almighty God’s actually dwelling in any house made by human hands. The great temple of the Jews had become in time a house of thieves and robbers; and, although God indeed had allowed it through the ages as typical of the greater temple yet to be revealed in Christ. Needless to say, such sentiments as these were enough to release the savage fury of the whole Sanhedrin against anyone who might dare to utter such thoughts.

The teaching in view here is fundamental to Christianity. It is not in any house, but “in Christ,” that one may receive all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 1:3)

It is too much for the secular Sanhedrinists that the meek and lowly Jesus should represent Himself as the long expected Messiah; but that His followers should begin preaching the spiritual body: of the risen Lord as the true temple of God, that was enough to send them into a frenzy of vicious hatred, releasing the full savagery of their carnal passions against Christians.

It was in the contemplation of this that their rejection of Christ and Christianity became final and irrevocable. Stephen read the situation of the Sanhedrinists at a glance and pronounced the judgment of the Holy Spirit against them.

Verses 51-53

This pronouncement was not an outburst of temper on the part of Stephen, but the announcement of God’s judgment upon evil men whose day of grace had at last expired; and it served as a fitting epitaph of the Jewish temple and its evil incumbents. The stroke of Divine punishment was largely poised and ready to fall upon the temple and the city which were so inseparably linked to the rejection and murder of the Son of God. There was utterly no way that God

would permit their institution to thwart, in any permanent sense, the world-wide proclamation of the truth. In about thirty-five years after Stephen's speech, the armies of Vespasian and Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, putting to death more than a million people, and severing from Jewish control the last effective device by which they might have hoped to destroy Christianity.

Verses 54-56

"Gnashing their teeth at him . . ." does not mean that they bit or chewed upon Stephen's flesh but that they were so infuriated that they ground their teeth together in a rage.

"Saw the glory of God . . ." It was fitting indeed that God should have given to the first Christian martyr such a glorious vision of eternal realities.

"Jesus standing at the right hand of God . . ." A. C. Hervey, *op. cit.*, p. 221 said, "Sitting at the right hand of God is the usual attitude ascribed to our Lord in token of His victorious rest, and waiting for the day of judgment; but here He is seen standing, as rising to welcome His faithful martyr, and to place on his head the crown of life."

"Son of man . . ." Only here, in the word of God, is there the use of this title for Jesus except in His own words concerning Himself.

Verses 57-58

"Covered their ears and rushed upon him . . ." This was a mob scene, not the execution of a deliberate sentence. It was illegal, no Roman sanction having been given for execution of the death penalty; and those critics who question John's gospel with its reference repeatedly to Jewish efforts to stone Jesus, declaring such to have been illegal and here impossible, are frustrated by this episode. Alan Richardson, *The Gospel According to St. John*, p. 135 said, "Here is a case of mob stoning such as is said to have been impossible."

"The witnesses laid aside their robes . . ." This was probably the only formality observed during the mob stoning of Stephen. The ancient law required that the hands of the witnesses were to be first against the one stoned, and Adam Clarke, *op. cit.*, p.736 said, "When they came to within four cubits of the place of execution, the victim was stripped naked." One cannot help wondering about those "witnesses" who had accepted money to swear lies against Stephen and thus found themselves to be his murders also. Thus, once

more, there is Scriptural testimony of the relationship between lying and murder, these two sins having been named by Jesus as “works” of Satan. (John 8:44)

“Young man named Saul . . .” Here in this bloody episode, there was evidence of the timeless principle that “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” That young man was never to forget what his eyes that day beheld, what his heart felt, and what his conscience said; and here was born in his soul that instant an impression that would in time recruit him to the faith of Christ and energize the greatest evangelist of all ages.

Verse 59

The peculiar construction here has the effect of making “calling upon the Lord” equivalent to praying to Jesus personally. This is one of the few prayers in the New Testament directed to the Lord Jesus Christ, rather than to the Father through Him.

“Receive my spirit . . .” This is a testimony to the fact the one’s spirit lives apart from the body; for Stephen asked the Lord to receive his spirit in the very act of his body’s death.

Verse 60

“Falling on his knees . . .” This Stephen did that he might die in an attitude of prayer and as a servant of the beloved Master.

“Do not hold this sin . . .” Adam Clarke, *Ibid*, commented, “Christ gave what some have supposed to be an impossible command: “Love your enemies; pray for them that despitefully use, and persecute you.” But Stephen shows here in his own person how practicable the grace of his Master had made this sublime precept.”

“He fell asleep . . .” The Christians quickly adopted this euphemism for death. It is not so much the superficial resemblances between ordinary sleep and the sleep of death, but the pledge of the resurrection which illuminates this beloved metaphor.

Upon the gravestones of two millennia, the believing community of the saints in Christ, have engraved upon the tombs of their beloved dead the sacred words, “Asleep in Jesus!”

CHAPTER 8

A second major division of Acts begins with verse 5; but the first four verses continue to focus upon the church in Jerusalem. The conversion of the Samaritans by Philip is given (verse 5-25, and also the conversion of the Ethiopian, (verse 26-40).

Verse 1a

This sentence actually belongs to the narrative in the preceding chapter. One is almost shocked at the casual way in which so important a person as Saul of Tarsus is here introduced.

J. S. Howson, *Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, p. 62 said, "We cannot dissociate the martyrdom of Stephen from the conversion of Paul. The spectacle of so much constancy, so much faith, so much love, could not be lost. It is hardly too much to say with Augustine that "the church owes Paul to the prayer of Stephen."

The same writer also called attention to the gloom which surrounded the infant church at that time, and to the "brightness which invests the scene of the martyr's last moments."

J. S. Howson, *Ibid.*, p. 63 wrote, "The first apostle who died was a traitor; and the first Christians whose deaths are recorded were liars and hypocrites. The kingdom of the Son of man was founded in darkness and gloom; but a heavenly light reappeared with the martyrdom of Saint Stephen.

Verse 1b

"On that day a great persecution . . ." does not mean that all of the persecutions occurred on that day, but that upon that day was initiated a policy of extermination directed against the new faith. God, in this, was overruling the evil which men perpetrated, in order to accomplish the extension of the gospel beyond the boundaries of Jerusalem. The first murderous persecution against the church was launched by the Sanhedrin, both the Sadducees and the Pharisees supporting the campaign to drown the infant church in blood.

"Except the apostles . . ." Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New testament*, Vol. Acts, p. 137 observed that, "For them to have fled would have exposed them, as leaders and founders of the new religion, to the charge of timidity and weakness.

They remained; and a merciful Providence watched over them and defended them from harm.”

In time, of course, the apostles would also leave Jerusalem; but for the moment they considered it their duty to remain.

Verse 2

“Devout men buried Stephen . . .” “Devout” means “earnestly religious;” and there is nothing to forbid the word’s application to Christians. Furthermore, the loud lamentation that accompanied the burial may not be construed as sorrowing “without hope.”

Orin Root, Acts, p. 55 said, “The brethren honored their first martyr, although in so doing they made themselves targets of the continuing persecution.” The word “devout” is used only four times in the New Testament; and this, more than anything else has supported the opinion that these were not “brethren.” E. H. Plumptre, Elliott’s Commentary on the Bible, p. 47 said that the Jewish law required that: “One who had been stoned for blasphemy would have had no funeral honors, and would have been buried with a “donkeys burial.” (Jeremiah 22:19)

No lamentation or other sign of mourning was permitted on behalf of one who suffered execution, the Jewish rule on this being derived from God’s command that Aaron should not mourn for Nadab an Abihu. (Leviticus 10:6)

H. Leo Boles, op. cit., p. 122 said that, “We do not know whether or not they were Christians;” but the guess preferred here is that they were!

Verse 3

The New Testament record of Saul’s persecution of the church leaves no doubt of the savagery and brutality with which it was carried forward. The youth, ability, and energetic zeal of the leading persecutor, revealed here as Saul, testify to the bitterness and fury with which the Sanhedrin sought to exterminate Christianity.

Satan has his own “providences,” no less than the righteous, and the evil one certainly took advantage of a circumstance that arose in the Roman government at the time of this persecution.

H. Leo Boles said, “The Jewish factions reigned supreme . . . the opponents of Christianity thrust men and women into vile prisons, and brought them before

elders in the synagogues, who tried to force them to deny Jesus; upon their refusal, some of them were put to death, others beaten; and all suffered many outrages.” (Acts 22:14; 26:10-11)

Verse 4

Joseph Benson, One Volume New Testament Commentary, in loco, noted, The great majority of the dispersed Christians held no office in the church; yet they preached wherever they went, and this spread of the gospel without the Holy City, this planting the church in the regions beyond, was effected not by the apostles but by an entirely voluntary and unofficial agency.”

THE CHURCH IN JUDAEA AND SAMARIA

(8:5--11:18)

Beginning with verse 5, a new era in the church begins. The tide of evangelism burst forth from the Jewish capital, bringing the good news of salvation in Christ to Judaea and Samaria.

Samaria was especially stressed by Luke, as he was a Gentile; and the Samaritans were practically despised by the Jews. Therefore, by this, he would show how the gospel was intended for all peoples, even the Samaritans. The evangelists who successfully preached Christ in Samaria was one of the Seven, called Philip the evangelist.

Verse 5

“The city of Samaria . . .” was considered by scholars as ambiguous, some declaring that it had reference to “Sychar,” as in John 4:5, and others thinking it referred to the city of Samaria, that is, the capital of the province. J. W. McGarvey, New Commentary on Acts, p. 138 said, “The definite article is now admitted to be a part of the Greek text, and this settles the question (as proved by the Sinaitic manuscript which has the definite article). It was the old capital . . . enlarged and embellished by Herod the Great.” The people of Samaria were regarded by the Jews with contempt, their mixed racial and religious characteristics being the cause of this.

Verse 6

The great Samaritan capital was overwhelmed with the message, certified to them as authentic by the miracles wrought by Philip.

SAMARIA

This city was built by Omri as a new capital of the ten northern tribes of Israel on a hill 300 feet high seven miles northwest of Shechem, overseeing the trade routes through the Esdraelon plain. (New Bible Dictionary, p. 1130)

This impressive butte afforded strong protection against assault, having steep sides and a permanent water supply within the fortification. Extensive excavations have revealed the city as one of great wealth, fragments of Ahab's ivory-paneled house and many other signs of extravagance were also uncovered. (1 Kings 22:39)

Alexander the Great conquered Samaria in 331 B.C.; Pompey and others began to rebuild it about 110 B.C.; but it was Herod the Great who restored, rebuilt, decorated, fortified, and embellished the city, naming it Sebaste (Augusta) in honor of his emperor Sebastiyeh.

Verses 7-8

Luke, a distinguished physician and scientist, here made a separation between physical maladies like palsy and lameness, and the conditions attributed to unclean spirits, the same being proof enough that the wisest men of that age recognized the phenomenon of demon possession.

“Much rejoicing in that city . . .” During the ministry of Christ the Lord commanded that his representatives should not go into any city of the Samaritans (Matthew 10:5-6); and, although Jesus Himself had given a strong indication of His ultimate purpose of including Samaritans in the gospel by His two days' residence in Sychar. (John 4:40)

It was appropriate that “much joy” should have marked the occasion. What a blessed reunion of peoples long estranged, and it was a reunion that could have been accomplished in no other way except by the gospel of Christ.

W. R. Walker, *Studies in Acts*, p. 58 observed, that, “It is the only thing that can reconcile hostile groups now; all other treaties, compromises, and “gentlemen's agreements” will last only till it is advantageous for one of the parties to break the compact.”

Verse 9

A full understanding of the triumph of the gospel in Samaria would be impossible without a knowledge of the people's widespread following of such a deceiver as Simon, hence Luke's mention of this condition.

Verse 10

Nothing is any more pitiful than the delusions which blind whole cities and populations of mankind. It is only the word of God that "makes wise the simple," "open the eyes of the blind," and provides a "lamp unto our feet." In direct proportion, therefore, as men are ignorant of the word of God, they become the prey of deceivers.

Verse 11

The influence of Simon was fortified and entrenched by years of successful operation; and his acceptance of the gospel, related a moment later, was all the more phenomenal in view of this; and with such a well-established base of influence, it would appear incredible on the face of it that he would have given it up without a struggle unless his motives had been good

Verse 12

Preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ . . ." This message of Christ and His kingdom included the commandment that men should believe, repent, and be baptized is implicit in the fact of the Samaritans having done exactly that when they believed Philip's preaching.

Baptism has the utility of identifying the church of Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God as one and the same institution. This is a fact so clearly taught in the New Testament that one can only be astounded at its denial by some scholars.

Matthew 16:18-19 Jesus said, "I will build My church . . . and I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." Here our Lord used "church" and "kingdom" interchangeably, that is synonymously.

Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church*, p. 150 declared, "It is plainly excluded that the house should mean one thing in the first sentence and another in the second," thus declaring the church and the kingdom the same.

S. McLean Gilmour, Interpreter's Bible, Vol. viii, p. 33 said, "The church has been the kingdom of God within the historical process." Matthew 13:41-43 The parable of the tares was explained by Jesus in such a manner as to make it clear that the church and the kingdom are one; for it is there declared that "the angels shall gather out of his kingdom . . . them that commit lawlessness.."

Richard C. Trench, Notes on the Parables of our Lord, p. 93 declared that, "It must be evident to everyone not warped by a previous interest, that the parable is, as the Lord announces, concerning the kingdom of heaven, or the church." Preaching Christ and His church is identical with preaching Christ and His kingdom.

WHAT IT MEANS TO PREACH CHRIST

- I. To preach Christ means to preach the Old Testament, because the Old Testament is a testimony of Christ, the Messianic hope of the Hebrews. Of the Old Testament Scriptures, Jesus said, "These . . . bear witness of Me." (John 5:29)
- II. To preach Christ means to preach the New Testament. The good news of salvation for mankind is found only in the word of Christ "through the apostles." (1 Peter 3:2) Since the word of the apostles is available only in the New Testament, one cannot preach Christ without preaching the New Testament.
- III. To preach Christ is to preach all of the great facts, promises, and commandments of the gospel.
 - A. Jesus wrought the greatest wonders ever seen on earth, even raising the dead again and again; He was despised and rejected; He died on the cross according to the Scriptures in order to procure eternal life for men; He rose the third day, ascended to the right hand of God, establishing His church, sent the Holy Spirit, is reigning till all enemies are destroyed.
 - B. The great promises of the gospel are the richest treasures belonging to men. Jesus will forgive men's sins if they will believe in Him and obey the gospel, bless them providentially in this life, make all things work together for their good, give His Holy Spirit to them

that obey Him, raise them up from the grave at the last day, and provide for them an eternal inheritance among the saints in light, giving them an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom.

- C. To preach Christ is to preach the commandments of the gospel. “Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments” (Matthew 5:19) shall be called least in God’s kingdom.
- IV. To preach Christ is to preach His church and kingdom. This blessed institution is called the bride of Christ, the vineyard of the Lord, the pillar and ground of the truth, the eternal assembly of God, the kingdom of the Son of His love, and the church of Jesus Christ.
- V. To preach Christ is to preach the plan of salvation, that is, faith, repentance and baptism for alien sinners, and the reception of the Holy Spirit and the continuation in the apostles’ doctrine, in the breaking of bread and of prayers on the part of the baptized.
- VI. Preaching Christ means preaching the obligations imposed by the Holy faith in Him. It is impossible to preach Christ without preaching the Christian virtues, church membership, church attendance, generosity, self-denial, and that community of love and interest which binds men together in Christ Jesus.

“Baptized men and women alike . . .” Again, in this, the New Testament bears witness of the fact that only accountable persons were received into the body of Christ, such a passage as this forbidding any notion that infants became Christians.

Verse 13

There is absolutely nothing in this passage to suggest that Simon’s “believing” was any different from that of others who became Christians, or that his “baptism” came about from impure motives. The thesis that Simon merely joined a movement with a design of procuring the powers manifested by Philip is refuted by the fact that such an intention would have been defeated by what he did.

Inspiration also says that, “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16); and the statement here proves that Simon was truly saved.

Don DeWelt, *Acts Made Actual*, p. 108 said, “There is as much reason to discount the conversion of the rest of the Samaritans as that of Simon, for their acceptance is described in the same words as that of Simon. Indeed, Simon is said to have “continued with Philip.”

Verse 14

The purpose of this apostolic mission to Samaria was evidently to qualify certain men for leadership through the laying on of the apostles’ hands and the accompanying endowment of them with miraculous powers. Peter does not appear in this passage as any kind of pope or authority sending others to do his bidding, but as himself “sent” by others.

Verses 15-17

“They were receiving the Holy Spirit . . .” has reference to receiving the Holy Spirit in miraculous measure, because, having been baptized, they had already received the gift ordinary of the Holy Spirit as Peter promised on Pentecost. (Acts 2:38)

“Not yet fallen upon any of them . . . “ means that none of them had received such miraculous powers as had been conferred upon the Twelve on Pentecost

“They began laying their hands on them . . .” The special power of the Holy Spirit in view in this passage was conveyed only through the laying on of the hands of the apostles. E. H. Plumptre, *op. cit.*, p. 50 was correct in seeing the gift here as, “Distinct from the new birth of water and the Spirit (John 3:5) which was given through baptism. The apostles looked on the Samaritans as qualified for the higher gift as well as for admission into the kingdom; and it was given to them, and not to Philip . . . to be channels of communicating it.”

Joseph Benson, *One Volume Commentary*, *in loco*, was evidently correct in his deduction that not all of the Samaritans received miraculous powers. He said, “Not that all who had been baptized in Samaria might receive miraculous gifts; for it was never so in any church, not even in Jerusalem; but that some might receive . . . for the confirmation of the gospel, and especially such as were designed for office in the church, or to be eminently active members of it.”

F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 182 distinguished this special gift from that which all Christians have, saying, “It seems to be assumed in the New Testament that those who believe and are baptized have also the ‘Spirit of God.’” Since there is

no way for any person to “see” that this gift ordinary is received, the distinction between the two gifts is a certainty. Moreover, J. W. McGarvey, *op. cit.*, p. 142 observed, “If Philip could have conferred this gift, the mission (of the apostles) would have been useless so far as is its chief purpose was concerned.”

Verses 18-19

“Through the laying on of the apostles’ hands . . .” In focus here is one of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. (Hebrews 6:2) It has nothing to do with ordaining church leaders, nor any reference to such a ceremony as confirmation; but it is basic to the understanding of such facts as: (1) the cessation of apostolic miracles, (2) the termination of inspiration among evangelists and teachers, (3) the impossibility of any such thing as apostolic succession, and (4) the necessity of concluding the canon of the New Testament.

Regarding Simon’s sinful proposal here, Everett F. Harrison, *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 412 said, “It appears that Simon was really converted, but that the habits of the old life had not been broken.”

“Simon saw . . . “ The supposition that Simon became a Christian hypocritically with the intent of adding to his own powers such abilities as Philip had demonstrated is refuted by this text. It was at some indefinite, and perhaps even considerable time after his conversion that Simon was tempted and fell into the sin mentioned here.

Verses 20-21

“Your heart is not right . . . “ The difference between what Peter said in this passage and what men affirm he meant is astounding. Joseph Benson, *op. cit.*, in *loco*, interpreted Peter’s meaning here, “His offering money for a spiritual gift is incontestable evidence that he was yet under the power of a worldly and carnal spirit and that he was yet a mere natural man, who received not the things of the Spirit of God.”

There is, of course, an ocean of difference between saying that a man’s heart is not right (present tense), and the declaration that it had never been right. Beware of believing men rather than believing the Lord.

Verses 22-23

Repent . . . and pray . . .” In this instance, the apostle Peter, using the keys of the kingdom of God promised him by the Savior (Matthew 16:19), opened the

way for a backslider from the faith, but had been an alien hypocrite pretending a faith and submitting to a baptism which were worthless, Peter would never have commanded him to repent and pray.

The door here opened for Simon's return is the same that must be entered by all Christians who, when overtaken by some sin, seek to return to the Lord.

"Gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity . . ." The sin of which Simon required forgiveness was not that of impure motivation of his baptism, nor of any insufficiency of faith in his conversion, but the specific wrong of thinking to buy the gift of God with money. Therefore, the apostle did not command Simon to repent of his sins (plural), but to repent of the specific sin in evidence, "repent of this wickedness of yours." If this had not been the case, Peter's command to Simon would have been different.

Verse 24

"Pray to the Lord for me yourselves . . ." One who sincerely prays for forgiveness naturally desires that others also should join in his supplications. Nothing in the text denies that this is what is indicated here.

J. W. McGarvey, *op. cit.*, p. 148 says, "Peter does not say to him as an alarmed man of the world, "Repent and be baptized"; but as to a sinning disciple, "Repent and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart shall be forgiven thee."

Verse 25

"Testified . . ." refers to the witness of the apostles to the effect that Jesus Christ arose from the dead, and including all of the things which Christ commanded that men should do, together with the warnings and promises of the gospel.

CONVERSION OF THE ETHIOPIAN

Verses 26-27

"An angel of the Lord . . ." One of the seven services performed by angels of heaven for the benefit of them that shall inherit eternal life is that of aiding providentially in bringing sinners under the influence of the gospel.

"Go south toward the road . . ." The angel's message to Philip set the evangelist on the road several hours in anticipation of the eunuch's departure from Jerusalem, being so timed that contact with him would be made. The eunuch knew nothing of this providence; and similarly, it may be that many a

man's contact with the gospel today is the result of providences unknown to himself.

"This is a desert road . . ." As used here, this has no reference to a waterless desert, but to a region without population. The area traversed by the road Philip and the eunuch traveled "has never been anything but a fertile plain called the Plain of Philistia," (Don DeWelt op. cit., p. 112), having many pools and a number of streams of water. "An Ethiopian eunuch . . ." Eunuchs were forbidden the enjoyment of full religious privileges by the Jews.

"Candace . . ." This was the dynastic name of the queens of Ethiopia, just as Pharaoh was the dynastic name, or title, of the kings of Egypt. The kingdom was that of Meroe. The fact of the eunuch's traveling some fifteen hundred miles to worship indicates that he was a devout worshiper of God. As he came along in his chariot, reading a roll of the prophecy of Isaiah, someone has said that he was like a man at sunrise, tilting his manuscript in such a manner as to catch the first rays of the rising sun of Christianity.

Verse 28

We cannot say what kind of chariot this was, or what kind of animals drew it, nor what part of the road marked the encounter described here; we cannot tell the color of this Ethiopian's skin, nor his age, nor the circumstances of his having been made a eunuch, and not even the name of the queen whom he served! None of these things were important.

Verses 29-31

"And the Spirit said . . ." How did the Spirit speak to Philip? It might have been through the angel who had previously appeared to him, or it could have been that one of God's prophets gave him the message. However it was, there is no evidence that this was merely an impression, a feeling, or any other kind of merely subjective thing. Intelligible words were spoken, a definite message communicated to Philip, and received and acted upon by him without delay.

"He heard him reading . . ." The eunuch was reading aloud from the roll of the prophecy.

Every man has a certain responsibility for his own salvation; but the man who fully exercises that responsibility does not in so doing receive that salvation by his own efforts alone. The providence of God, the ministry of others, and above

and beyond all, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, are all in it. If a man should refuse or neglect to meet his own responsibilities in the matter, it is not likely that he shall be saved. Notice the part played by this Ethiopian officer in the circumstances leading to his salvation:

He was a devout and faithful worshiper of God, living up to all the light he had. He made a journey of fifteen hundred miles to worship in the city where God had commanded men to worship. He either took him on the journey, or procured at Jerusalem, a copy of the prophecy of Isaiah. He was reading aloud from the word of God at the time of his encounter with Philip.

He confessed to a stranger that he could not understand what he was reading and that he needed guidance in his study. He invited a teacher of the gospel to sit with him in his chariot. He asked a question concerning a passage of God's word that he could not understand.

There are countless men today who have never done any of the things mentioned above; and, when it is considered that this Ethiopian did everything mentioned here, there can be no wonder that God acted providentially to bring him to the knowledge of his full duty and to open for him the door of eternal life. The bare facts of this episode shout the message to every lost soul on earth that one should be mightily exercised in pursuing a saving knowledge of the truth.

Verses 32-33

“As a sheep . . . as a lamb . . .” Christ was the “lamb slain from the foundation of the world,” “the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.” Jesus meekly submitted to the outrages perpetrated against Himself offering no more resistance than a lamb, either sheared or slaughtered. A goat, for example, slaughtered in the traditional manner, responds with blood-chilling cries that may be heard a mile away; but a sheep submits to the butcher's knife without a whimper.

“In His humiliation . . . judgment taken away . . .” The verdict of Jesus' Roman judges was one of innocence; but the Savior's meekness and humiliation had no effect against the mob demanding His crucifixion; therefore, Pilate took away His judgment of innocence and ordered His crucifixion.

“Who shall relate His generation . . .?” F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 188 translated this line as, “Who can describe his generation?” Who indeed could describe that wicked generation which slew the Son of God? What a crescendo of shame was reached by that evil company who resisted every word of the Savior, who mocked Him, hated Him, denied the signs He performed before their very eyes, suborned witness to swear lies at His trials, rejected the verdict of innocence announced by the governor, and through political blackmail, mob violence, and personal intimidation of the governor demanded and received His crucifixion?

Jesus Himself proclaimed His identification with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, “A Servant . . . who would give His life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45) John the Baptist extolled Him as “the Lamb of God,” conspicuously identified with the Servant in Isaiah.

As F. F. Bruce, *Ibid*, said, “There is no evidence that between the time of Isaiah and the time of Christ anyone had identified the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 with the Davidic Messiah of Isaiah 11, or with the “one like unto the Son of man (Daniel 7:15); but Jesus identified them and fulfills them.”

It should be noted that another understanding of: “His generation who shall declare?” is represented in the words of E. H. Plumptre, *op. cit.*, p. 53, “Who shall declare the number of those who share His life , and are, as it were sprung from Him?—that is, who can count His faithful disciples?”

Verses 34-35

The apostolic preachers all laid heavy emphasis upon the Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus Christ; and no better place for a beginning could be imagined than the famous 53rd chapter of Isaiah, so rich with prefigurations of the life of our Lord. The message was always the same, namely, that men should believe on the Lord Jesus with all their heart, repent of their transgressions and be baptized into Christ.

Verses 36-37

The request for baptism on the part of the eunuch was the immediate and direct result of Philip’s preaching unto him Jesus; and in this is manifest the fact that preaching Jesus means preaching baptism for the remission of sins. There are some in our generation who fancy that they are preaching Jesus, but whose

hearers never request baptism; and in that is manifest the fact that such preachers are not preaching Jesus at all.

It was the custom from the very earliest Christian times for converts to confess their faith upon the occasion of their baptism, a fact referred to by Paul. (Ephesians 5:26)

Verses 38-39

Under verse 31, it was noted that the eunuch did no less than seven things in the discharge of his duty to be concerned about his own salvation; and here it is clear that he did three additional things. He requested baptism, commanded the chariot to stand still, and submitted to baptism. There are many today who need to command their own chariot to stand still while they submit to the ordinance of God.

“Down into the water . . . up out of the water . . .” Baptism administered here was by immersion.

“Went on his way rejoicing . . .” Throughout the book of Acts, Luke brings into view the “joy” and the “rejoicing” of those who obeyed the gospel.

Note: One grand purpose of this book is to reveal how men become Christians; and taken collectively, the various conversions in Acts reveal one plan of salvation and one alone. Those who were saved: heard the word of God, believed what was preached, believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, repented of their sins, confessed the Savior, were immersed, that is, baptized into Christ, received forgiveness of their sins, received the gift ordinary of the Holy Spirit, and they rejoiced in salvation. There is no other way for any man to be saved.

Verse 40

“Azotus . . .” was the ancient Philistine city of Ashdod; and Philip preached there and in all the cities of the Mediterranean coast till he came to Caesarea where he established a residence.

CHAPTER 9

This chapter reveals the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, the mighty persecutor (verse 1-19), Paul’s first ministry at Damascus, ending in the Jewish plot to kill him (verse 20-25), his journey to Jerusalem and departure for Tarsus (verse 26-30), a brief summary of the continued prosperity of the church (verse 31), and

the account of two miracles by Peter, (a) the healing of Aeneas at Lydda (verse 32-35) and (b) the raising of Dorcas from the dead (verse 36-43).

Verses 1-2

E. S. Howson, *Life and Letters of Saint Paul*, p. 68 wrote regarding the chronological placement of this event, "Saul's journey from Jerusalem to Damascus took place not far from that year which saw the death of Tiberius and the accession of Caligula," that is, in 37 A.D. It is a little surprising at the authority exercised by the Jewish hierarchy in so distant a place as Damascus. E. S. Howson, *Ibid.*, p. 677 wrote that the Sanhedrin, "Claimed over the Jews in foreign cities the same power, in religious questions, which they exercised at Jerusalem."

It was the death of Tiberius, leading to a loss of Roman control of Damascus during the reigns of Caligula and Claudia, which made it possible for the arrogant Sanhedrin to pursue their goals with such impunity at that particular time.

"The synagogues . . ." This indicates a large Jewish population in Damascus. Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities and Wars of the Jews*, translated by William Whiston, p. 703 told how the citizens of Syrian Damascus, "Came upon the Jews and cut their throats, as being in a narrow place, in number ten thousand, and all of them unarmed, and this in one hour's time, without anybody to disturb them.

Flavius Josephus, *Ibid.*, p. 853 mentioned the same event later, saying that, "The barbarous slaughters of our people cut the throats of eighteen thousand Jews, with their wives and children." The point of these numbers is that the Jewish community in Damascus was very large. These massacres took place during the Jewish wars prior to A.D.70.

"Belonging to the Way . . ." In Acts, this title of the Christian religion recurs five times. This title was explained by F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, p. 194 as "a term used by the early Christians to denote their own movement, considered as the "Way" of life or the "Way" of salvation." "Threats and murder . . ." There were many slain on account of their faith.

Verse 3

Calculated by any of the roads that might have been taken to Damascus, E. M. Blaiklock, *Cities of the Old Testament*, p. 123 wrote the distance was “between 130 and 150 miles, a journey of something like six days.” The time of this approach to Damascus was about noon (22:6); and from this it seems that Saul was pressing man and beast to the limit of endurance in his haste to execute his fury against the Christians.

John Wesley, *New Testament Commentary*, in loco, thought it probable that “they were traveling on foot”; but W. H. Howson, *op. cit.*, p. 71 pointed out that “we do not know how he traveled.” Wesley’s guess would be supported, it seems by the fact of Paul’s being led by hand” (22:11), which would appear to have been unnecessary if he had been riding a horse.

DAMASCUS

The history of this city is so marvelous, however, that we may be excused if we pause to consider this “oldest city of earth. (E. H. Howson, *op. cit.*, p. 71) This city existed in prehistoric times (Genesis 14:15); David captured the city (2 Samuel 8:5); Paul the apostle was baptized there; and from it he escaped over the wall in a basket; T. E. Lawrence, whose dramatic revolt ended there, described it as “the sheath for his sword”; but “It was the place where Saul, soon to be Paul, drew His sword (that of the gospel), never to sheathe it again. (E. H. Blaiklock, *op. cit.*, p. 16) Of particular interest is that “One of the ancient streets, running NE to SW through the city, is still named ‘Straight Street,’ as in Acts 9:11.” (New Bible Dictionary, p. 288)

As Saul of Tarsus approached that ancient city, he little dreamed that it would be the end of his persecutions of Christ and the beginning of his preaching of the gospel.

Verse 4

From Paul’s later references to this event (22:14), it is clear that this was an objective vision in which he not only heard but saw the Lord.

“Why are you persecuting Me?” In this appears one of the profoundest doctrines of Christianity, namely, that Christ is still upon earth in the person of His followers who compose His spiritual body; and that whatever is done to Christ’s church is done to Himself!

The deductions from the truth in evidence here are far-reaching and comprehensive:

1. What is done to the church is done to Christ.
2. Hatred of the church is hatred of Christ.
3. Persecution of the church is persecution of Christ.
4. Membership in the church is membership “in Christ.”
5. Liberality toward the church is the same toward Christ.
6. Neglect of the church is the neglect of Christ.
7. Refusal to belong to the church is a refusal to belong to Christ.

Verse 5

“Who art Thou, Lord . . .?” This is the great question which must engage the mind of every person who would be saved. Angels bend low over the head of any man who earnestly seeks the answer; for it is who Jesus is and was and ever is that endows His holy religion with relevance and authority for all who ever lived.

J. S. Howson, *op. cit.*, p.75 declared, “This revelation was not merely an inward impression made on the mind of Paul during a trance or ecstasy; but it was the direct perception of the visible presence of Christ.”

Paul asked, “Have I not seen Christ?” (1 Corinthians 9:1); and upon mentioning the appearances to the Twelve, he said, “Last of all . . . He appeared to me also.” Ananias stated that our Lord “appeared to Paul in this way” (Acts 9:17). Thus the New Testament affirms that this was a genuine appearance of Jesus of Nazareth to Saul of Tarsus.

F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 196 said, “The more one studies the event, the more one agrees with the eighteenth-century statesman George Lyttelton, that “the conversion and apostleship of Saint Paul alone, duly considered, was of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a Divine revelation.”

The question Paul asked of Jesus, saying “What will You have me to do?” is not given here; but the answer to that question is given, and thus there is no doubt that Paul asked it.

Perhaps everyone, at one time or another, has entertained the thought of how wonderful it would be to see the Lord face to face and ask Him what to do to be saved. Paul had that privilege here; and what Jesus commanded him to do,

illuminates all men. The Lord did not ignore the commission he had given His church, nor bypass the preaching of His faithful evangelists on earth, or pause to give even so important a person as Saul of Tarsus any personal word from heaven on what to do to be saved. Jesus Christ, speaking from the right hand of the Majesty on high, referred the inquiring sinner to the gospel as it would be delivered to him by the faithful preacher Ananias. And when Saul received it, it was the same as Peter had given on Pentecost requiring men to believe, repent and be baptized into Christ.

“What you must do . . .” indicates that whatever message Saul would receive would be neither unessential nor optional, but mandatory. In the sequel to this Acts 22:16, is the only commandment, recorded in the New Testament as being to Saul. It reads, “And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name.”

In the light of these facts, what an incredible folly is the theological nonsense that would make baptism into Christ either optional or unessential for them who would be saved!

“Must . . .” This is a big word in the New Testament. In the passage before us it reveals baptism as one of the “musts” regarding salvation. The familiar heresies setting aside this Divine “must,” should be rejected.

Verse 7

Paul’s account of this as given in 22:9 states that his companions, “Heard not the voice of Him that spoke to me,” and, “Stood speechless” does not contradict each other. First, in Daniel 10:4f, where the account of Daniel’s vision by the river Hidekel, which vision he saw, carrying on a conversation with the angel, but the men with him did not see it. George DeHoff, *Alleged Contradictions in the Bible* p. 230 wrote, “The expression “stood speechless” has no reference to posture. One may stand in doubt, stand firm, stand in fear, stand speechless, or stand in awe while in any position of the body. These stood speechless” while flat on the earth.” It was Christ’s purpose not to speak to Saul’s companions, but to speak to Saul; that all-sufficient will was enough to account for the fact of Saul’s hearing though others did not.

Verses 8-9

That Saul was temporarily blind following the appearance of Christ to him is clear from the fact of their leading him. What a different status came to him as a result of his blindness; and how utterly unlike his projected entry into Damascus was the entry itself. Not as a savage persecutor, but as a helpless blind man, he entered the city where his life would be changed forever. The emotional shock he received is indicated by his not eating anything for three days.

Verses 10-12

These verses describe what was taking place while Saul was in the state described in verse 9. Don DeWelt, *Acts Made Actual*, p. 124 said, "Jesus had told Saul that it would be told him what he must do, but he did not say when Saul would receive that information. Saul evidently felt that his sin was so great that he could only fast and pray . . . this state continued for three days and nights."

A number of significant things appear in this passage. (1) Regarding what Saul should do to be saved, it was not a preacher of the gospel, but "a certain disciple" who told him. (2) Ananias was evidently a man upon whom the apostles had laid their hands. (3) The miracle of Saul's receiving his sight is equal in every way to the miracle of his being stricken blind. (4) The time-lapse here of three days and nights between Saul's vision of Christ and his baptism is a unique interval. W. B. West stated that, "This is the longest interval in the New Testament between the conviction of the sinner and his baptism."

Saul believed, repented, and confessed Christ as "Lord" on the Damascus highway; but this did not save him. The Lord commanded that it would be told him what he must do in Damascus. Not only is it true that faith, repentance and confession did not result in his immediate forgiveness; but it is likewise true that even the laying on of the hands of Ananias, three days later, for the purpose of giving him recovery from blindness did not signal the forgiveness of Saul's sins.

On the contrary, Ananias said, "Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name." (22:16) Saul, in a sense, of course was "converted" by the appearance of Christ; but as Don DeWelt, *op. cit.*, p.123 noted, "Saul believed, repented and confessed Christ as "Lord;" but he was not forgiven of

his sins until he had risen and was baptized, “washing away” his sins (22:16). Conversion takes place in the sinner’s heart, but forgiveness takes place in the heart of God.”

Therefore, conversion in the complete sense of including forgiveness must include not merely faith, repentance and confession, but baptism also. Paul himself made this abundantly clear in this passage, “Though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.” (Romans 6:17-18)

Verses 13-14

The astonishment and reluctance of Ananias are understandable. The saints in Jerusalem had sent information ahead to Damascus regarding the ravages of the Lord’s church by Saul of Tarsus; and it is significant that the believing community in Damascus had accurate advance information of what could be expected when Saul arrived there.

Verses 15-16

“Before the Gentiles and kings . . .” There is no way to separate these words from the great prophecy of Isaiah regarding the new name to be borne by God’s children. (Isaiah 62:2) Thus, Paul was specifically named in this passage, upon the occasion of his baptism, as the name-bearer of the new name that God would give unto His people.

Verse 17

“Brother Saul . . .” Ananias, out of respect to what the Lord had revealed to him, referred to Saul as “brother,” not merely a “brother Israelite,” but as a brother in Christ.

“May regain your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit . . .” Saul received his sight immediately upon the imposition of Ananias’ hands; and, through the same instrumentality of Ananias who commanded him to be baptized, he received the Holy Spirit. The gift in view here is the same as that promised on Pentecost to all who repented and were baptized. (2:38) That Saul did not receive the Holy Spirit before his baptism is implicit in the fact that the latter was necessary to the “washing away” of his sins. (22:16)

Verses 18-19

“Scales . . .” This expression makes it mandatory to understand Saul’s blindness as the physical loss of his sight, a fact further proved by the necessity of his companions leading him into Damascus. (9:8) This verse does not say that Saul received his sight, and received the Holy Spirit, but that he received his sight and arose and was baptized, indicating that the gift of the Holy Spirit followed his baptism.

Verses 19-22

This paragraph reveals the basic fundamental of Christianity, namely, that Jesus is the Christ of God. This was the first message of the converted persecutor, and his last one this being the note that dominated his preaching throughout the noble career that began here.

Verse 23

“When many days had elapsed . . .” H. Leo Boles, op. cit., p. 149 gave, as the probable chronology of the events in view here, the following:

1. Saul was struck down on the Damascus road. (9:3-8)
2. Three days of blindness and prayer. (9:8)
3. Sight restored, baptized and received the Holy Spirit. (9:10-19)
4. Preached Christ and confounded the Jews. (9:19-22)
5. Made a sudden departure to Arabia for further study and communion with God (Galatians. (1:17-18)
6. Came back to Damascus and renewed his preaching with such force that the Jews decided to kill him. (9:23)
Note: This was three years after his baptism.
7. The plot to kill Paul was discovered, and he escaped to Jerusalem. (9:24-25)
8. The Christians were afraid of him. (9:26)
9. Barnabas took up his cause and recommended him. (9:27-29)
10. Paul began preaching where Stephen left off. (9:29)
11. There was another plot to kill him. (9:29)
12. The Jerusalem church sent him to Tarsus. (9:30)

Verses 24-25

The mighty preaching of the erstwhile persecutor should have been enough to convert all who heard him. John Peter Lange, Commentary on Acts, p. 465 said, "The miracle Christ performed upon the mind of such a man outshone the miracle upon men's bodies; giving such a man another heart was more than giving men to speak with other tongues."

And yet, far from converting all who heard, Saul's preaching only confirmed the desire of some who wished to take away his life. This is proof enough that evidence alone cannot convert any man. Prior to salvation, there must be, on the part of one who is to receive it, "an honest and a good heart," (Luke 8:15), as our Lord Himself declared.

It is also evident in this passage that one who faithfully follows the teachings of Christ is certain to encounter hostility and outright hatred.

"Through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket . . ." Paul expressly tells us that "the ethnarch kept watch over the city with a garrison, purposing to apprehend him" (2 Corinthians 11:32; and, incidentally, this indicates that Rome did not control Damascus at that time. The ethnarch was the governor of the city appointed by Aretus, whose daughter was Herod's wife whom he forsook for Herodias. E. S. Howson, op. cit., p. 83 reasoned that, "From an unguarded portion of the wall, in the darkness of the night, probably where some overhanging houses, as is usual in Eastern cities, opened upon the outer country, they let him down from a window in a basket."

Verse 26

J. R. Dummelow, Commentary on the Holy Bible, p. 831 thought it strange, "That after his arduous work in Damascus, the church of Jerusalem would still doubt the fact of Paul's conversion," but it was doubtless due to the lack of adequate communications in those days, and also to the reluctance of those Christians whose loved ones and friends had been imprisoned, scourged, and even put to death by Saul of Tarsus, to believe that his conversion was sincere. The more remarkable thing, it seems to this writer, is that there was found one, the noble Barnabas, who dared to believe it fully and to undertake his recommendation to the whole church.

“Trying to associate with the disciples . . .” As noted earlier, such an expression as this makes “Joining the church” a legitimate concept, provided the uniting with a given congregation is understood by it.

Verse 27

We may never know till the judgment day how much is owed by all men to the loving trust of Barnabas, not merely for his advocating that of John Mark, whom Paul was so ready to reject, following that defection of the young Mark in Perga of Pamphylia. (13:13; 15:38-39)

All that is revealed of Barnabas in the New Testament justifies the affirmation that he was a good man full of wisdom and of the Holy Spirit. In his espousal of Paul’s sincerity in this episode, there is an illustration of the truth that it is better to trust than to distrust; it is better to believe the best of men than it is to believe the worst of them.

Verses 28-30

In the purpose of the all-wise God, Paul the apostle was not destined to be accepted in Jerusalem; rather his was a call to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles. Therefore the circumstance of the hatred which naturally arose against Paul in Jerusalem was not removed by the Father, but was made the occasion of sending him to Tarsus.

We should not pass this by, however, without noting the dauntless courage of Paul. Jerusalem was the city where he had led the persecutions against the church; there he had stood consenting to the death of Stephen; there he was acquainted with those implacable foes of the Lord and of His kingdom who had formerly been his allies, friends, and fellow persecutors. He knew their bitterness and their unwavering hatred of Christianity; and yet, to that city, before these people, and in the presence of those very same individuals, he boldly and unequivocally preached the gospel of the Son of God.

“To Caesarea . . .” This city figured prominently in the life and ministry of the apostle Paul.

CAESAREA

This magnificent city was built by Herod the Great on the site of Strato’s Tower, and was located on the Mediterranean shore, some 23 miles south of Mount Carmel and 65 miles northwest of Jerusalem. Palestine had no adequate

seaport till this city was built. God's purpose of containment for the chosen people in Palestine was served by the fact that no seaport existed during the greater part of Israel's history.

But when, in the fullness of time, God had at last brought into the world His glorious Son, and at a time following the conquest of the whole world by Alexander, and the establishment of a single language, known and understood all over the world; after these events, and after the Christ had suffered on Calvary and the gospel was ready to be preached to all men, God had but lately made ready a marvelous harbor of Caesarea as a portal by which the world would travel to the ends of the earth.

Caesarea was the home of Cornelius (10:1); here Peter baptized Cornelius the Gentile and all his house; here a king was destroyed by an avenging angel (12:1ff); and here Philip the evangelist with his family labored in the spread of the gospel. (21:8f)

Apart from Jerusalem itself, Caesarea may well be accounted the most important New Testament city, certainly one of the most important. Caesarea was the residence of Roman procurators, a strongly garrisoned town with a military presence numbering at least 3,000, and by far the key city in Rome's relationship with Palestine. In fact Tacitus said, "Caesarea is the capital of Judaea." (E. M. Blaiklock, *op. cit.*, p.74)

Verse 31

Luke intended that we should see the connection between this period of relative peacefulness and the departure of Paul, just mentioned. Such was the fury and bitterness of the Jewish community over the defection of one of their most able partisans, that they could hardly have suffered Paul's presence in Jerusalem without continued persecution; but, in his absence, there appeared for a while a period of quietness during which the church grew and prospered.

In time, of course, Paul would return, speaking his epic words of wisdom and judgment against Israel; but for the present he would be left out of sight in Tarsus.

In the meanwhile, Luke returned to stress two apostolic miracles performed by Peter, and which mighty signs contributed emphatically to the growth of the church.

PETER HEALS AENEAS

Luke's purpose here is evidently that of showing how the apostles continued to preach the gospel in Judaea and Samaria and Galilee. It comes to light here that Peter had traveled and preached along the whole seacoast of Palestine in some of the same cities evangelized by Philip. Everett F. Harrison, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 418 said, "Peter found in Lydda a group of Christians who had probably fled there in the dispersion caused by the persecution in Jerusalem. Here Peter healed Aeneas. This area was populated in part by Gentiles."

Verses 32-35

Azotus, Gaza, Lydda, and Sharon were all cities along the Mediterranean coast; and both Philip and the apostle Peter bestowed labor upon this coastal region. The mention of healing Aeneas shows that God was honoring the promise of Jesus that mighty signs should follow the preaching of the apostles "conforming the word." (Mark 16:17ff) The healing of a person so long invalid was soon widely known and published with a result that many turned to the Lord.

PETER RAISES THE DEAD

Verse 36

"Joppa . . ." This city too belonged to the group mentioned under the preceding verse, being in fact the nearest thing to a good natural seaport belonging to Palestine; but its importance had been eclipsed by Caesarea. The Christian community here had doubtless begun in the same way as that of Lydda.

"Dorcas . . ." This is the Greek form of Tabitha; and the word means "little gazelle," "fawn," or a "roe." From this word, "Dorcas Societies" in many places have been named being societies formed to sew for the poor.

Verse 37

The sad scene which emerges here was one of grief on the part of the whole Christian community for the death of the "little gazelle" whose flying fingers had so often labored for the relief of human want and distress.

"The upper room . . ." Even the devout and faithful Dorcas had not proved to be immune to the ravages of death; and as her decease was the first to be

recorded of any Christian who died of natural causes, it was appropriate that God should take note of it with a purpose of encouraging and strengthening His church; and so it proved to be.

Verse 38

It is not related here what the disciples expected Peter to do, but that something was expected is implicit in the fact and manner of their appeal. It would seem that they did not seek Peter's presence for the purpose of conducting the funeral.

Verse 39

"All the widows . . ." And who might these have been if not members of the same class of which Dorcas belonged; and in this is a clue to the fact that "the little gazelle" might also have been a widow, and that the other widows who joined so spontaneously in the mourning were her friends and co-workers in the charities of which Dorcas had made such extensive contributions.

Significant in this passage is the "remembering" that features the death of every person. Death is a time of remembering the deeds, words and achievements of the departed. How happy are they whose demise is an occasion for remembering what was done on behalf of others, especially of the poor and needy, as was the case with Dorcas. For the unfaithful, death is a time of remembering things melancholy, pathetic and tragic; but from the very times described here, the Christians sorrowed not as those who have no hope.

Verses 40-41

Peter had been well schooled at the feet of the Master. Just as our Lord had done when Jairus' daughter was raised, Peter cleared the room. He went down upon his knees; and from this is a legitimate inference that in this also he emulated the action of the Master, because it is clear enough from John's gospel that all of Jesus' miracles were wrought in answer to prayer.

Peter used the very words that Jesus had used, except for substituting the name of Tabitha, the word "Tabitha, arise" being quite similar to "Damsel, I say unto thee rise". (Mark 5:41)

The wonder of wonders is that God in heaven answered the prayer of the faithful apostle, and Dorcas was recalled from the dead.

Verse 42

The result of the raising of Dorcas was exactly the result of the raising of Lazarus, of which the Pharisees said, “Behold . . . the world has gone after Him.” (John 12: 19)

Verse 43

Luke did not relate exactly how long Peter continued to preach and spread the gospel in Joppa, his success being greatly augmented by the event of Dorcas being raised from the dead. The mention of the man with whom Peter made his home at Joppa was perhaps for the double purpose of showing: (1) that a tanner was not considered beyond redemption, thus nullifying a Jewish concept which stressed the perpetual defilement of tanners because of their working continually with dead bodies, or portions of dead bodies; and (2) also for the sake of it bearing upon the event next to be related in chapter 10.

CHAPTER 10

This chapter is concerned exclusively with the conversion of Cornelius, the same event being under consideration in chapter 11. Luke’s devoting so much space to the narrative of a single conversion indicates the importance of it. It was in the conversion of this Roman centurion that the issue of receiving Gentiles into Christ was finally decided.

That the devout Gentile chosen by God for the special treatment accorded him in such things as: (1) visitation by an angel; (2) hearing the gospel preached by one of the Twelve; (3) having the Holy Spirit fall in a manifestation suggesting that of Pentecost, etc.—that the Gentile chosen for such blessings should have been a soldier must be regarded as significant.

J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospel’s, Luke*, p. 205 noted that, “In no case is there the slightest hint that the profession of a soldier is unlawful in the sight of God.”

There are some eight or ten centurions mentioned in the New Testament, and without exception they all appear in a favorable and commendable light. The absolutely unique aspect of the event related in this chapter should not be overlooked, there never having been the slightest hint anywhere in the New

Testament that what happened at the house of Cornelius was to be considered any such thing as a normal Christian experience.

THE CONVERSION OF CORNELIUS

Verses 1-2

“Italian cohort . . .” Cohort means the tenth part of a Roman legion; but a detached cohort, as this evidently was at Caesarea, usually had a thousand men. (A. C. Hervey, *Pulpit Commentary*, Acts, p. 332)

The commander of such a regiment was called a “chiliarch,” and his force was divided into hundreds, each commanded by a centurion. It is strange that the decimal system should have prevailed in that ancient army and that today the same system should be advocated as the best possible and extended to include all weights and measures.

“Feared God with all his household . . .” The devout, God-fearing Cornelius had enlisted his entire household as participants in the worship and devotions which were practiced by them; and this stresses the quality of that house where Peter would “open the door to the kingdom of the Gentiles by the only possible ‘key’—the word preached in the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 16:19.) (E. H. Trenchard, *A New Testament Commentary*, p. 309)

Yes, without doubt, this is another instance of Peter’s using the keys which the Master had mentioned.

“Gave many alms . . . and prayed . . .” This has reference to Cornelius’ gifts to the Jewish people. He gave to all who were needy. There would appear to be a certain affluence, if not indeed wealth, belonging to Cornelius. The mention of “much alms” points toward greater than ordinary ability.

Verse 3

Although called a “vision,” the addition of the word “openly” would seem to require that this supernatural event be understood as the actual appearance of an angel of God to Cornelius. A. C. Hervey, *op. cit.*, p. 333 observed that, “It was a clear angelic appearance. There was no indistinctness or confusion about it, and consequently it left no kind of doubt in the mind of Cornelius.”

“Cornelius . . .” It is notable that the names of individuals are known by God and those representatives whom He commands to bear messages to men. Thus the angel called Cornelius by his name. Despite the fact of this man’s worship

and alms-giving, already mentioned, there is absolutely no evidence that he was a proselyte to Judaism. A. C. Hervey, *Ibid*, observed that, “He is spoken of simply as a Gentile and as uncircumcised, indicating that though he had learned from the Jews to worship the true God and to practice those virtues which went up as a memorial to God, yet he was in no sense a proselyte.”

“An angel of God . . .” The Scriptures reveal no less than seven classes of functions performed by these holy beings on behalf of them who shall be saved, one of these being as in evidence here, that of aiding providentially in bringing sinners into contact with the gospel.

Verse 4

“What is it, Lord? . . .” That one should have an angel speak to him is beyond all natural phenomena. If the Christian religion is a supernatural religion; and, if the supernatural elements in it can be denied, the entire system is not merely worthless, but detestable.

The popular idea of winged angels is probably derived from the cherubim (Exodus 25:26 and from the seraphim (Isaiah 6:2); but there are no New Testament descriptions of angles with any mention of wings.

“A memorial before God . . .” Man’s natural desire for a permanent memorial may be truly realized, but not in the types of monuments so often erected. The true memorial ascends to the presence of the Father in heaven, and it is made up of the prayers and alms of those who, upon earth, loved God and sought to know and do His will.

Verses 5-6

The angel’s directions as given to Cornelius to enable him to contact Peter were full, explicit, sufficient, and correct. The big question that appears here, however, is, “Why did not the angel himself tell Cornelius what to do to be saved?”

Orin Root, *Acts*, p. 75 noted, “Jesus committed this task to man and does not intend to relieve him of it. An angel sent Philip to the Ethiopian; but it was the man Philip that told him what to do to be saved. Also, Jesus Himself appeared to Saul; but it was Ananias who was commissioned to tell Saul what to do to be saved; and this same pattern is here. Not the angel, but Peter would tell Cornelius what to do to be saved.”

The importance of Peter's participation in this event was stressed by John Peter Lange, Commentary on Acts, p. 192 saying, "It was so ordered that the first pagan should be baptized and received into the church, not by an ordinary member of the church, not by an evangelist like Philip, but by one of the Twelve themselves, and indeed by that one, who had by his words and deeds, become the most prominent of their number."

Verses 7-8

Several of the soldiers were assigned to wait on Cornelius continually, and one of these was dispatched with the two servants sent to Joppa, perhaps to serve as an escort or guard. The authority to initiate and order a military mission involving a soldier plainly belonged to Cornelius, indicating an authority more like that of a colonel or general in present-day armies, rather than that of a captain, with which rank centurion is usually equated.

The detail thus dispatched by Cornelius left almost immediately; because their arrival time at Joppa, some 30 miles distant, on the following day about noon, demands the understanding that they departed for Joppa about 3:00 o'clock that same afternoon of the angel's visitation, the same being the ninth hour (verse 3).

"After he had explained everything to them, a mutual love and trust between Cornelius and his subordinates appear in such a thing as this. Cornelius fully explained the details and purpose of his mission to trusted servants and sent them on their way.

THE LORD APPEARS TO PETER

Verses 9-10

"About the sixth hour . . ." This was noon, of course. F. F. Bruce, The Book of Acts, p. 218 said, "Noon was not one of the appointed times for prayer, but pious Jews prayed three times a day." (Psalm 55:17) It is remarkable that Peter, a fisherman, should have been one of the most devout of his race, a fact indicated by his practice of a long-ingrained habit of prayer at noon.

"While they were making preparations . . ." It was noon; and the usual preparations for the midday meal in Simon the tanner's house, were being made, perhaps delayed a little; and as many a preacher has done since, Peter dozed while the ladies prepared dinner.

“He fell into a trance . . .” This of course, is something utterly different from merely falling asleep. Robert Milligan, op. cit., p. 150 said, “A trance denotes a state in which the soul seems to be freed from the body; so that it can then perceive things which lie beyond the reach of the natural senses.” Nothing much is known of the condition into which Peter fell during the revelation recorded here; but it may be assumed that the kind of trance into which he fell was not the ordinary state of the so-called “trance” into which some are said to enter now. In the Old Testament the example of Balaam reveals that he, before uttering his prophetic oracles, saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open. (Numbers 24:4, 16)

All of the mention here of what Peter “saw” would indicate that this “trance” also was one in which his eyes remained open, thus revealing his condition to have been like that of the prophets of old who received words from Almighty God.

Verses 11-12

“There were in it . . .” is the significant word concerning all those creatures let down. God was about to open Peter’s eyes to the truth stressed by Paul, that “Every creature of God is good (to eat); and nothing is to be rejected, if it be received with thanksgiving, etc.” (1 Timothy 4:4)

This was no new doctrine “discovered” by the apostles; Jesus had plainly taught this, but it took a miracle to get Peter to believe it. (Mark 7:15-19) This miracle was required before Peter could understand that this meant the Gentiles could receive the gospel without being circumcised and keeping the law of Moses.

Verses 13-15

“By no means, Lord . . .” In all ages there have been those who, while acknowledging Jesus as Lord, nevertheless presumed to contradict what the Lord taught. This phenomenon was pointed out by Jesus Himself in Luke 6:46.

“I have never eaten . . .” What men have always done, or what their behavior is, usually determines their reaction to any given circumstances. Peter did not yet know, despite all the teaching he had received of the Lord, that the Mosaic restrictions on diet were no longer binding on Christians. Peter’s refusal seemed

perfectly right and proper to him, but it was wrong. God, at that very moment was in the act of teaching him the fundamentals of the new dispensation.

Verse 16

Robert Milligan, *Ibid*, understood this verse as teaching that, “The whole scene, including the sights and sounds, the vision and the dialogue, was repeated three times.” The purpose of this was to emphasize it.

Verse 17

The timing of all events is ordered by the infinite God; and it is obvious in Acts that the inspired prophets and evangelists of the apostolic age regarded the timing of events with the utmost attention. The appearance of the three messengers from Cornelius coinciding so exactly with a vision repeated three times to Peter, certainly must have assisted the apostle in relating the two occurrences.

Verses 18-19

Providences of this kind can occur only when God wills them; and, although it would be rash to suppose that in our own times we are able properly to interpret such things, nevertheless, we may in awe and reverence behold them.

Verse 20

Peter did not depend upon the coincidence of events for the decision he had to make, but the Spirit spoke to him in audible, intelligible words, commanding what he should do.

“I have sent them . . .” These words appear to identify the speaker with the person Peter addressed as “Lord” in verse 14. F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 220 said, “On that occasion the voice seemed to come from without; and it may have been a voice that Peter well remembered, and immediately recognized.”

Verses 21-22

Coupled with the revelation already given to Peter, this message left Peter no choice except to receive it as a command from God.

Verse 23a

This was Peter’s first break with the exclusiveness of the Law of Moses. The Gentiles he invited into the house, shared the meal which by that time had been prepared for him, and kept them overnight, the lateness of the hour requiring that they should wait till the morrow to start to Caesarea. By this one act, Peter

swept aside the prejudices of a lifetime, letting in the fresh air of the kingdom of heaven.

Verse 23b

“Brethren . . . accompanied him . . .” As an act of prudent foresight, Peter took the precaution of taking witnesses with him. He no doubt anticipated that what would be done in Caesarea might lead to misunderstandings and disputes, unless every word and act should be certified by competent witnesses.

Significantly, the guidance of God’s Spirit did not diminish Peter’s responsibility to act prudently in all things.

Verse 24

The godly life and righteous desires of Cornelius had been shared with all who were in any sense near or intimate with him, this giving a glimpse of how one’s influence reaches others. “He entered into Caesarea . . .” A. C. Hervey, *op. cit.*, p. 334 said, “This was a memorable event, being the first invasion of the Roman Empire by the soldiers of the cross.”

Verse 25

WORSHIP DEFINED

“Worshiped him . . . “

All five New Testament words translated “worship” indicate that worship is an act, not some kind of subjective feeling. Note these:

- (1) *Proskuneo*, means “to bow down toward” and is used of worshiping God, Christ, man, dragon, beast, the image of the beast, demons, and idols.
- (2) *Sebomai*, means “to revere,” stressing the feeling of awe; but the word is used of reverencing God. (Acts 16:14)
- (3) *Sebazimai*, means “to honor religiously.” (Romans 1:25)
- (4) *Latreuo*, means “to serve or to render religious service.” (Philippians 3:3)
- (5) *Eusebeo*, means “to act piously toward.” (Acts 17:23)

Thus, the New Testament Greek words confirm the usual dictionary definition of “worship” as a transitive verb meaning “to pay an act of worship, to venerate, or to adore.”

- A. The public assemblies of Christians, dating from the resurrection itself, specifically commanded by the apostles and forming an essential element in the worship of Christ, are physical acts of presentation before the Lord, as evidenced by Romans 12:1.
- B. The Quaker conception that the Lord's Supper is a "spiritual act," requiring no physical emblems such as bread and grape juice, is incorrect. Faithful observance of the Lord's Supper is a physical act.
- C. Giving money or wealth to the support of God's work is worship in the truest and highest sense, properly attended of course by an attitude of loving obedience to the Father; but that attitude is not the worship; it is the giving of one's means that is worship.
- D. Praying is a physical thing, involving the total person in both mind and body; but it is nonetheless the action of an appellant seeking the blessing and forgiveness of God.
- E. Singing is likewise physical, as well as spiritual and mental. Singing is something that Christians do, not merely something they feel.

Worship in any real sense is doing what God has commanded us to do; and, although it must be admitted that subjective feelings inevitably arise in the doing of those things, they must be looked upon as a consequence of worship and not as worship itself. (Hebrews 13:15) Such praise is not a sacrifice, so long as it is merely "in mind." It is when it passes the portal of the lips that it becomes a sacrifice of praise to God.

Cornelius' worshiping of Peter refers not merely to some attitude within Cornelius' heart but to what he did in Peter's presence.

Verse 26

Peter did not know the subjective state of Cornelius' mind; but what Cornelius did was wrong and under no circumstance to be allowed, regardless of the state of his mind in so doing.

Verse 27

What a great opportunity was this to preach the truth. Peter preached the gospel to all who were there assembled, with the amazing result that the total company obeyed the gospel, the same being perhaps the only occasion ever

known in which an entire company of many souls unanimously accepted the truth.

Verses 28-29

This introduction by Peter was probably spoken as much for the brethren who were with him as it was for the benefit of the company before whom he spoke. Orin Root, *op. cit.*, p. 79 believed that, “Peter did not yet realize that he was there to preach the gospel; and if this seems absurd to us, it is because we fail to realize the gulf between Jew and Gentile.”

The view here is that Peter fully anticipated the entire event, and that it was precisely in view of what Peter had already concluded would take place in Caesarea that he invited the brethren to accompany him.

“One of another nation . . .” F. F. Bruce informs us that this expression is frequently used in the LXX (Septuagint) to denote “an uncircumcised Philistine.” Cornelius at once responded with a resumé of the circumstances which had prompted his request.

Verse 30

“Four days ago . . .” The travel time between Caesarea and Joppa was two days, the distance each way being thirty or thirty-five miles. A. C. Hervey, *op. cit.*, p. 334 said both going and coming, they would “probably have stopped the night at Apollonia, which was half-way, on the coast road.”

“The ninth hour of prayer . . .” was 3:00 o’clock in the afternoon.

“A man . . . in shining garments . . .” The “shining garments” is often mentioned in describing the appearance of an angel. It should also be noted that the angel did not walk in, he merely appeared in the presence of Cornelius.

Verse 31

(Note: This verse repeats the information already given in verse 2.)

Verses 32-33

“You have been kind enough to come . . .” The meaning here is not exactly certain, being (1) either the equivalent of a “thank you” for Peter’s response, or (2) a complimentary notice of the dispatch with which Peter had come, or perhaps something of both.

“We are all here .” to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord . . .”

Cornelius, by such a remark, made it clear that his only concern was in knowing what God's message was, concerning himself and the household he had assembled.

"To hear all . . ." could hardly have failed to ring a bell in Peter's heart; for he had heard the Lord command that "all nations" should be taught "all things" whatsoever Jesus had commanded. (Matthew 28:18-20) His duty, therefore, was crystal clear; for here was a Gentile household belonging to the "all nations," declaring that they were assembled to hear "all things" the Lord commanded.

PETER'S ADDRESS

Verses 34-35

"Opening his mouth, Peter . . ." This is the same expression found at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1) where it is related that "Jesus opened His mouth, etc." This indicates formal preparation and the deliberate presentation of significant truth. F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 224 said that such an expression "is used to introduce some weighty utterance." Peter's first sentence swept away the racial prejudice of centuries.

The first sweeping declaration that God's salvation was available to people of "every nation" was perhaps the only thing in Peter's sermon that was any different from the sermons he had been preaching throughout Palestine. Before passing to a consideration of the rest of Peter's speech, an event, the chronology of which is given in the next chapter, should be noticed:

"And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, just as He did upon us at the beginning." (11:15)

Verse 44, below, says that "While Peter was still speaking these words the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message."

"While Peter was still speaking . . ." does not contradict Peter's own statement that the Holy Spirit fell upon them as he "began to speak."

Verse 36

Peter's entire speech, as recorded here, requires only fifty-eight seconds to be read aloud. This speech is relevant to the Gentile's evangelization: (1) the Lordship of Jesus Christ, (2) the mighty works of the Master, (3) the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, (4) the final judgment of all men, (5) the

remission of sins through faith in Christ, and (6) the fact of Christ's being appointed to be the Judge of all men in the last day.

All of the mighty teachings listed in (1) through (6) above are not merely relevant to the evangelization of every man on earth, whether Jew or Gentile; but they are the sine qua non of the whole system of Christianity as delivered by Christ and His apostles.

Verse 37

"You yourselves know . . ." Cornelius and his assembled friends were far from being raw pagans; and the publication of the gospel had already been so extensively achieved, that Peter presumed their knowledge of the saying that "Jesus is Lord of all," and perhaps also their knowledge of some of the great Christian teachings being enunciated.

Verse 38

"Anointed Him with the Holy Spirit . . ." The anointing of Jesus with the Holy Spirit occurred at His baptism, at which time the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove alighted and remained upon Him; also, at that same time, the voice from heaven declared Him to be the Son of God, beloved of the Father.

"Healing all who were oppressed by the devil . . ." The view that Satan oppresses men's bodies with diseases appears in this, as also in Luke 13:16.

Verse 39

The scandal of the cross was emphasized by the words "hanging Him on a cross;" but, in the apostolic preaching of that event, it is clear that they also grasped the glory of it—that "by His stripes" we are healed, and that "God laid on Him" the iniquity of us all.

Verses 40-41

This is the heart of Christianity. If this is not relevant to every man on earth, then nothing is relevant. The facts in view here are the cornerstone and foundation of all faith and doctrine of Christ. This is the essential theme that both launched and sustained the triumph of Christianity over the pagan religions of antiquity. The apostles did not preach what they had merely heard, but what they had heard and seen. A. C. Hervey, *op. cit.*, p. 336 rightly affirmed that, "This constant reference to eyewitnesses is an indication of the historical character of Christianity, and of the importance of Christian evidences."

Verse 42

In these dynamic words, Cornelius was made aware of the great truth that Jesus Christ will judge every man at the last day. Implicit in such an epic fact is the teaching: (1) that all men shall be raised in a general resurrection; (2) that Christ is risen from the dead; (3) that He has ascended to heaven; (4) that all power and authority in heaven and upon earth are His; and (5) that salvation may be found only in Him.

Verse 43

“Everyone who believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sins . . .” is not a statement of the “sole condition” of salvation, as often alleged, but a revelation that only believers shall be saved. Within seconds, or minutes, after this, Peter commanded his hearers to be baptized. (Verse 48)

Verse 44

This event actually occurred as Peter began to speak, being intended not to save Cornelius for Peter would tell him, “Words whereby he and his house should be saved,” but for the purpose of convincing Peter and his companions that the gospel should be preached to Cornelius and company without reservation or prior requirement.

Regarding the fact of the Holy Spirit in this instance falling upon people who had not been baptized, whereas on Pentecost the promise of the Holy Spirit was made to depend upon the repentance and baptism of believers, many strange and untenable theories have been erected.

E. H. Trenchard, *op. cit.*, p. 311 for example, thought here, “The Pentecostal baptism was extended to Gentile believers on the sole ground of repentance and faith.” However, there is no mention of repentance in this passage; and, as the Spirit fell on them “as Peter began to speak,” it is incorrect to say that they were “believers” when that occurred. It is a mistake to make this unique occurrence a normal Christian experience.

Beasley-Murray, G. F., *Baptism in the New Testament*, p. was certainly correct when he declared that, “This gift of the Spirit without baptism must be viewed as exceptional, due to a Divine intervention in a highly significant situation, teaching that Gentiles may be received into the church by baptism, even when they had not removed their uncleanness though circumcision and sacrifice.”

It is that “exceptional situation” mentioned by Beasley-Murray that must be emphasized here. The Divine manifestation of the Holy Spirit falling on those Gentiles of Cornelius’ household was not for the purpose of convincing the apostle Peter and his companions of the propriety of welcoming the Gentiles into the church of God upon the same conditions as everyone else. And again from Beasley-Murray, “Whatever the relationship between baptism and the gift of the Spirit elsewhere in Acts, there appears to be no doubt as to the intention of Acts 2:38; the penitent believer baptized in the name of Jesus Christ may expect to receive at once the Holy Spirit, even as he is assured of the immediate forgiveness of his sins.”

Verses 45-46

The outpouring here was like that on Pentecost (:15), only in this case it was not upon the apostles, but upon those who were hearing an apostle. The clear intention was that of sealing absolutely their reception of Gentiles into the church of Jesus Christ upon the same basis as others.

Verse 47

Luke mentions that no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit, can he.

Verse 48

“Ordered them to be baptized . . .” Peter did not jump to the conclusion, as many moderns have done, that “Glory be; this does away with baptism altogether;” but, as Frederick Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, p. 103 noted, “It was impossible for the apostles to associate the gift of the Holy Spirit with anything but baptism; the new converts were immediately baptized.” Moreover, the fact that baptism for Gentiles was necessary to their salvation, no less than it was declared to be on Pentecost, appears in the facts: (1) that an angel of God told Cornelius that Peter would tell him words whereby he would be saved (11:14); and (2) that in all of the words spoken by Peter there was but one commandment, that requiring them to be baptized.

“In the name of Jesus . . .” They are in error who view baptism as here commanded in the name of Jesus to be any different from that enjoined in the great commission, “to baptize . . . into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

Baptism is invariably “in the name of Jesus Christ,” meaning by His authority; but the purpose is the unity of the convert with the sacred triple name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

The baptism “in the name of Jesus” is at the same time “into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Alexander Campbell, Acts of Apostles, p. 76 said, “The authority by which any act is performed must never be confounded with the meaning or intention, of it.”

CHAPTER 11

There is a close relationship in chapters 9, 10, and 11. In chapter 9, the “name bearer,” Saul of Tarsus, was chosen of God to bear the new name before Gentiles, kings and children of Israel; in chapter 10, the acceptance of Gentiles into the church of Christ was adopted as mandatory by the apostle Peter; and in this chapter, such acceptance of Gentiles was recognized as the official policy of the whole church, and the development of the first great Gentile congregations was recorded, this having taken place at Antioch.

There is the record of Peter’s defense of his conduct in the matter of association with Gentiles, resulting in full approval by the entire church. (Verses 1-18)

The next section of Acts begins with verse 19 through verse 21. This begins the record of the movement of the church toward “they scattered because of persecution.” Luke began this section referring back to the situation that he had explained in chapter 8:1, that is, to the conditions prevailing immediately after the martyrdom of Stephen. Even from that early time, there had existed progressive efforts on the part of some to enlist Gentiles, especially at Antioch. Next is the mission of Barnabas from Jerusalem (Verses 22-24), his bringing of Saul to Tarsus (Verse 25), and the giving of the new name by “the mouth of the Lord.” (Verse 26)

PETER ON THE DEFENSIVE

Verse 1

The startling news of what had occurred in the house of Cornelius had outrun Peter, arriving in Jerusalem before he did. H. Leo Boles, Commentary on the Acts, p. 176 thought: “The news came to Jerusalem before Peter left Caesarea.”

Verse 2

“Those that were circumcised . . .” included practically all of the entire discipleship in Jerusalem, and not merely “the circumcision party” which later developed.

Peter’s views before the conversion of Cornelius were those of practically the whole church at that time. Joseph Benson noted, “Even afterward, on one occasion, Peter withdrew himself from the believing Gentiles, for fear of the Jews.” (Galatians 2:12)

“Took issue with him . . .” Alexander Campbell, Acts of Apostles, p. 76 translated this: “disputed with him,” declaring that this “is more appropriate in questions of debate, and especially in such a category.”

Edgar J. Goodspeed, The New, An American Translation, p. 250 translates it, “The advocates of circumcision took him to task with having visited and eaten with men who were not Jews.”

H. Leo Boles, op. cit., p. 176 wrote, “As so many have failed to point out, Peter was not regarded as any kind of ‘Pope’ or overlord.”

Joseph Benson, op. cit, in loco said, “It is evident that the Jewish Christians had no idea of the supremacy of Peter, much less his infallibility.”

The complaint against Peter does not seem to have been that he had baptized a Gentile, but that he had baptized a Gentile without first requiring him to submit to circumcision and come under the Law of Moses.

Verse 3

“You went to . . .” Alexander Campbell, op. cit., p. 76 said, “Went” is better if translated “associated with.”

“To uncircumcised men . . .” John Wesley, One Volume New Testament Commentary, in loco, said the Greek here is, “men with a foreskin:” and is more expressive of scorn than the merely negative form of the English.”

Verses 4-10

Peter quite properly concluded that his best defense would be a straightforward narrative of the events and circumstances which had proved so convincing to himself.

“For comment on this passage see preceding chapter.”

Verses 11-12

“Without misgivings” or “without making and distinctions . . .” This was the great word regarding Jews and Gentiles then; and so it still is. God has one plan of redemption for all men; and the scriptures do not reveal any special plan for any race or condition of men.

“Six brethren . . .” These six men were Peter’s companions on the mission to Caesarea.

Verses 13-14

“Word to you by which you will be saved . . .” Implicit in this is the fact the baptism of the Holy Spirit was not in order to save Cornelius, nor were all of the alms-giving and prayers sufficient to save him. F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 235 expressed it, “Salvation did not enter Cornelius’ house until Peter came there with the gospel.”

A necessary deduction from this is that Cornelius’ baptism was a prior condition for his being saved, the command that he should be baptized being, in fact, the only commandment Peter addressed to him.

B. W. Johnson, *The New Testament with Explanatory Notes*, p. 464 declared that, “This is the first instance of a household baptism named in Acts.” Those who are meant by this “household” is “his kinsmen and near friends” (10:24), there being no mention of infants. It is declared that these who were baptized in the Holy Spirit and commanded to be baptized in water “heard” the gospel. (10:45)

Verse 15

A number of the most important facts are revealed in this short sentence.

(1) “As I began to speak) . . .”

The baptism of the Holy Spirit which occurred so early, before Peter could deliver his soul-saving message, shows that the purpose of this Spirit baptism was unrelated to the salvation of Cornelius, being intended rather as a sign to Peter and his companions that God had called the Gentiles through the gospel.

(2) “Upon us at the beginning . . .”

These words clearly designate Pentecost as “the beginning,” this being the prime authority for accepting that date as the beginning of the church of Christ.

(3) Peter's linking the event in Cornelius' house with that of Pentecost also justifies the conclusion pointed out by Alexander Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 78 when he wrote, "It is a logical inference from these words, that from the Day of Pentecost to the calling of the Gentiles, no similar display of the Spirit had been given, else they would not have gone so far back. The interval between Pentecost and this event was (at least) seven or eight years."

Thus the clearly miraculous event of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is restricted to these two occasions, when upon the Jews at Pentecost and upon the gentiles here, the whole of mankind was symbolically included. Therefore, it is undoubtedly true that, in the public manifestations of supernatural gifts, the Holy Spirit "descended only twice." (Ibid)

These outpourings were visible and were followed by miraculous demonstrations; and these two instances of such a thing are the "only scenes called in the Holy Scriptures, the baptism, or immersion in the Holy Spirit." (Ibid)

No phenomenon like that has been observed since.

Verse 16

This remark about baptism was also made by John the Baptist. (Mark 1:8) Both John the Baptist who baptized in water and the Lord Jesus who baptized in the Holy Spirit found occasion to mention the contrast; and G. H. C. MacGreggor, *Interpreter's Bible*, Vol IX, p. 144, denied this in his unsupported assertion that, "The words are put on Jesus' lips" by Luke is narrow-minded and trivial scholarship.

Verse 17

J. W. McGarvey, *Commentary on Acts*, p. 220 said, This remark, taken in its historical connection, means that Peter would have been withstanding God, if he had refused to baptize the persons, or had made a difference in other respects between them and Jews."

Verse 18

This should have been the end of the circumcision problem which disturbed the church at that time and for years afterward. The umbilical cord that bound the infant church to Judaism should have been accepted as cleanly cut by this decision approving Peter's actions; but Peter wavered, and the powerful Judaizing party in the Jerusalem church put up a prolonged struggle to drag

circumcision and various other Jewish ceremonials into the church of Jesus Christ. E. H. Plumptre, *op. cit.*, p. 73 wrote, “The Judaizers in opposing Paul were acting against the church from which they pretended to derive their authority.”

Cambridge Bible, One Volume New Testament Commentary, *in loco* said, “Those who maintained the necessity for observing the older Covenant did so through misguided zeal for the Law; but some did so from national pride and bigotry. (Galatians 6:13)”

The problem was no doubt compounded by the large number of Pharisees who had accepted Christianity (6:7); and it would not finally be laid to rest until the apostle Paul would deliver the book of Galatians as the coup de grace for Judaism in the church. Indeed the problem, although distinguished, has survived to modern times in such things as Saturday worship, instruments of music in worship, the burning of holy incense, etc.

“The repentance that leads to life . . .” In one sense repentance is something that men must do; in another it is something that God gives. When God consents to permit repentance on man’s part as one of the prior conditions of forgiving him, it is in essence a gift from God.

“Leads to life . . .” Whereas the New Testament speaks of faith being “unto” righteousness (Romans 10:10), repentance being “unto” life (as here), it is of baptism alone that the word of God declares it to be “into Christ: (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27), and “into one body” (1 Corinthians 12:13).

III. THE CHURCH MOVES TOWARD THE UTTERMOST PARTS OF THE EARTH

The third and final great section of Acts begins here with verse 19, where appears the first movement of the church to the ends of creation. Antioch, being the first way station, the scene of the first great Gentile congregation gathered out of paganism, where God gave the sacred name “Christian” to His people, where the erstwhile persecutor, known as Paul, would begin those labors which would determine to a large extent the future character of Christianity. As Peter’s name and personality had dominated that previous section of Acts, Paul’s would dominate this.

Verse 19

This is a retrogression in Luke's narrative, going back to Jerusalem and memorable events there: the death of the first martyr, the first historical emergence of Saul of Tarsus, the dispersion of the disciples who went everywhere preaching the word, and the tribulation that accompanied those events.

"No one except to Jews alone . . ." Despite the fact of the great commission having been intended for "all nations," the first Christians, almost exclusively Jewish in a racial sense, understood this as "all Jewish nations!" It was this fundamental understanding which lasted several years, and which precipitated the supernatural events leading to the inclusion of Gentiles.

The whole purpose of Christianity would have been nullified and thwarted if the world-saving gospel should have been reduced to the status of another Jewish sect; and there was no way that Almighty God would have permitted such a thing.

Chapters 9, 10, and 11 detail the dramatic, God-ordered events which stripped Christianity of its Jewish character and made a world-wide religion out of it. Alexander Campbell, *op. cit.*, p.78 writes, "The formula now becomes a sort of technical term, indicative of the message, the last message of God to the world. It is called "the word of the kingdom" or "the word of life;" but it is never called "the letter," but the word of the gospel."

Verse 20

"Speaking to the Greeks . . ." Here, it is clear that Gentiles are meant, the same being the only proper antithesis of "Jews only" in the preceding verse. A. C. Hervey, *The Pulpit Commentary, Acts*, p. 358 said, "Speaking he word . . ." It has been noted that, "The statement that the men of Cyprus and Cyrene preached the gospel to them is contrasted with the action of others, who preached to the Jews only. Obviously, therefore, these Hellenes were not Jews." J. R. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, p. 833 said, "To these unnamed Cyprians and Cyrenians belongs the credit of first preaching the gospel systematically to Gentiles." It is doubtless this fact that Luke intended to bring into focus here. One can hardly resist the thought that perhaps Barnabas might have been among them.

Both DeWalt and McGarvey were sure, however, that this preaching to Gentiles did not take place till after the news of Peter's baptism of Cornelius had been circulated. Don DeWalt, *Acts Made Actual*, p. 151 said, "What prompted these Jews to do this, preach to the Gentiles? Could it not have been that the word of the works of Peter among Gentiles reached these places; and, when this report came, they did not hesitate to take the gospel to the great Gentile center of Antioch?"

The importance of Antioch as capital, in a sense, of Gentile Christianity, justifies a little further notice of it.

ANTIOCH

The modern city of Antioch with a mere 30,000 inhabitants is not to be taken as anything like the Queen City of the East with its half a million souls at the time of events in this chapter. Situated astride the Orontes River, some twenty miles from the sea, where the river emerges from between the Lebanon and Taurus mountain ranges, it was a city of great extent and remarkable beauty. It was distinguished by two great colonnaded streets intersecting at the center and dividing Antioch into quadrants. (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 2, p. 70)

"Octavian, Tiberius, Trajan . . . and Hadrian adorned and equipped it with temple, theater, colonnade, circus, bath aqueduct, and all the architectural features and embellishments of a Roman metropolis."

The Seleucidae founded Antioch prior to 300 B. C., no less than four kings having a part in it, the royal residence of their dynasty having been constructed on an island in an artificial channel, the city itself occupying a larger island in the Orontes, but extending far beyond both banks, embracing also the slopes of precipitous Mount Silpius. It was the "third metropolis" of the Roman Empire, one of the eyes of Asia," and "one of the leading cities of the world." Of particular interest to Christians is the quality of life which marked this mother city of Gentile Christianity. Just west of Antioch, Seleucus I had constructed the Groves of Daphne, wherein was the mighty temple of the Pythian Apollo. It was a center of vice, featuring the harlot-priestesses of Daphne and Apollo who on occasions engaged in public ceremonies "stripped of clothing." (E. H. Plumptre, *op. cit.*, p.73.) Heathenism in its most vulgar and debasing forms dominated the life of the people.

It is a credit to the strength and glory of Christianity that in such a city there came to be at one time more than “a hundred thousand members.” (Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 2, p. 149.) Such was the city where the Gentiles turned to the Lord and where the disciples were first called Christians. Mighty are the ways of the Lord.

“Preaching the Lord Jesus . . .” Preaching the Lord Jesus was the same as preaching Christ, or preaching the things concerning the kingdom.

Verse 21

The fact is as obvious to us, in the twentieth century as it was to Luke that “the hand of the Lord was with them.” “A large number who believed turned to the Lord . . .” Believing and turning to the Lord are two different things. It is a gross error to read this as if it said, “A great number believed (turned to the Lord.)”

Those who were already believers “turned to the Lord.” (Note: “Turned” is a verb in the past tense, while “believing” is a participle.)

J. W. McGarvey, *op. cit.*, p. 224 well said it, “Turning to the Lord is a different act from believing, and is subsequent to it. As in Acts 3:19, where turning to the Lord follows repentance, the specific reference is to baptism, which is the turning act. Equivalent to the expression here is: “The Corinthians believed and were baptized.” (Acts 18:8)

Verses 22-24

“Barnabas exhorted them all . . .” This should have been expected of that man whose very name meant “Son of Exhortation.”

“They sent Barnabas . . .” This had the character of a formal mission from the church in Jerusalem. That the church should have sent a man with the character and disposition of Barnabas indicates that there was already in Jerusalem a strong attitude favoring the inclusion of Gentiles in the church. Regarding the chronology of these events, A. S. Hervey, *op. cit.*, p. 358 noted, “There is no clue to the length of time elapsed between the flight from persecution and the arrival in Antioch, except that Saul had had time to sojourn three years in Arabia, to come to Jerusalem, and from thence to go and settle in Tarsus, where Barnabas found him; thus leaving abundant time for Peter’s operations in Judaea and Caesarea.”

Verses 25-26

“When he had found him . . .” This seems to say that Barnabas might have had some difficulty in locating Saul; and, if the fact of Saul having been disinherited by his family (as supposed) had cut off his association with them, this could have complicated the problem of locating him. In any case, Barnabas succeeded in finding him and bringing him to Antioch.

Some have speculated on the reasons which might have prompted Barnabas to search out Saul and introduce him at Antioch. Probability it was because the word of the Lord had revealed to Ananias that Saul would bear the Lord’s name before the “Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.” (Acts 9:15)

“The disciples were first called Christians . . .” The importance of this makes it imperative to study more fully both the name “disciples” and the name “Christian,” which replaced it.

CONCERNING DISCIPLES

“Disciples” occurs 72 times in Matthew, 44 times in Mark, 38 times in Luke, 77 times in John and 30 times in Acts—261 times in the first five books of the New Testament; but it is not used once in the last 22 books of the New Testament. The significance of this is further emphasized by the fact that the apostle John, after using it 77 times in the gospel, never used it even once in the short epistles and Revelation.

Following the book of Acts, no follower of the Lord was ever called a disciple. The conclusion is mandatory that “disciple” as a name for members of the body of Christ was countermanded and negated by the Holy Spirit.

The word “disciple” means “learner”; and although true in a sense that Christians must always be “learners,” there is a vital and necessary sense in which Christians are “taught persons,” in all vital elements of the holy faith. Kenneth Hoover, Minister, church of Christ, Benton, Kentucky, Private Manuscript, 1975, stressed that, “The truth has been revealed from God, in Christ, by the Spirit, through the apostles, and that, “The truth is the Gospel of Christ, the word of God.”

Christians are commanded to love the truth, hear the truth, walk in truth, obey the truth, and to “search the truth in love.”

CONCERNING THE NAME “CHRISTIAN”

The near-unanimous chorus of scholars and wise men shouting that this name was given in derision of the new faith is as shameful as it is amazing. If the name “Christian” was given in derision of the faith by the enemies of the gospel, whatever became of that everlasting “new name” which the mouth of God named upon His children?

- I. God promised that He Himself would give His people a new name. He promised that it would be given at a time when “the Gentiles and kings” had seen His “righteousness.” (Isaiah 62:2) It was not to be a name which enemies would give, for God said, “I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off.” (Isaiah 56:5) It was not to be a name which would rise beyond the fellowship of God’s people; but, as the Lord said, “I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off.” (Isaiah 56:5)

It was not to be a name which enemies would give, for God said, “To them I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial, and a name better than that of sons and daughters.”

If God made good on that promise, the name was given in His house and within His walls; and that cannot mean in the ranks of the despisers of His truth.

- II. The significance of the name’s being “new.” If the “disciples” had continued to be the name of God’s followers, there would have been nothing new in such a designation, because the Pharisees and John the Baptist also had “disciples.” Implicit in the new name was the teaching that Christianity was never to be confused with Judaism, or any of the sects of the Jews, all of which had their “disciples,” the very name being indicative of the Jewish connection.
- III. This is the only name specifically commanded by an apostle as the one in which the Lord’s people should “glorify God.” (1 Peter 4:16)

And how, it may be asked, does the name “Christian” worn by God’s people glorify the Father in heaven? This is done by its emphasis upon the name of Christ, the name literally meaning “of Christ.” Herein also appears the utter impossibility of such a name having been given by the instigation of Satan. It is

contrary to the nature of Satan to suppose for even a moment that the evil one would have concocted a name with so much of Christ in it.

IV. The contrast between the New Testament handling of the name “Christian,” as distinguished from many designations applied to the followers of the Lamb in the New Testament, stresses the uniqueness of the term “Christian.”

For example, the Holy Spirit referred to the Lord’s followers as:

- (1) the “called out” of God (Romans 1:6; 8:28);
- (2) sons of God (Romans 8:14);
- (3) children of God (Romans 8:16);
- (4) the sanctified (1 Corinthians 1:2);
- (5) the faithful in Christ (Ephesians 1:1);
- (6) servants of Christ (Philippians 1:1);
- (7) the elect of God; (1 Peter 1:1);
- (8) God’s elect (Colossians 3:12; Titus 1:1);
- (9) saints in Christ—the term “saints” being used 50 times in the epistles;
- (10) brethren, this designation being used 132 times in the epistles; and
- (11) “the church,” as used 85 times.

Nevertheless, it was the name “Christian” which above all others came to be the historical designation of the brethren. This was the only name an apostle commanded the saints to wear (1 Peter 4:16), the only name advocated before kings (Acts 26:28), and the only name consciously designed by an inspired author of a New Testament book as a replacement for “disciples,” as in 11:26 above.

V. Finally, the events leading to the giving of this new name was ordered, not on earth, but from heaven. First, a “name bearer” as chosen of God and converted in chapter 9.

The disciples were called “Christians” first at Antioch. From this, the conclusion may not be denied that Paul himself announced this name within the church at Antioch, the inspired apostle being God’s spokesman.

Verses 27-28

“Prophets . . .” There were an undetermined number of prophets in the first age of the church, the same ranking next in authority to the apostles themselves. (1 Corinthians 12:28)

“Agabus . . .” is again mentioned in Acts 21:10. The event of his prophesying the famine in the reign of Claudius is helpful in fixing the chronology of the events here narrated. Jack P. Lewis Historical Backgrounds of Bible History, p. 144 said, “Claudius reigned from A.D. 41-54.” He is the only emperor to have been named twice in the New Testament, here and in 18:2, the latter instance referring to his expulsion of the Jews from Rome.

A man of great promise at first, Claudius degenerated in office, outraging his subjects by a “marriage to his own niece,” (Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 5, p. 781), the shameless Agrippina, whose son Nero succeeded Claudius when the latter was poisoned.

Verses 29-30

“For the relief . . .” What a commendable thing it was that the Gentile converts to Christianity, so long hated and despised by Jews, should have responded so nobly to the distress of their fellow Christians in Jerusalem and environs.

Every Christian participated “according to his ability” in making up the bounty for their relief. All over the world today, Christians still respond in the same manner to such disasters as that ancient famine.

“The elders . . .” This is the first mention of elders of the church in the New Testament. That these men were recognized as the duly appointed governors of the Lord's Church is implicit in the fact that Barnabas and Saul gave the alms they brought, not to the apostles, but to the elders.

Note: The qualifications of elders are given by Paul in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, along with the commandment to “appoint elders in every city.”

CHAPTER 12

A comparison of the last verses of chapter 11 and this chapter suggests that Barnabas and Paul made that trip to Jerusalem with relief for the victims of the famine at about the time of the events given in chapter 12, this being in 44 A. D.,

a date determined by the death of Herod Agrippa 1. That monarch had succeeded in putting together the whole domain of his grandfather Herod the great, and had also been given the title of king by Claudius. He was a staunch friend of the Jews and was no doubt influenced by them to make the move to destroy Christianity.

He martyred James, seized and imprisoned Peter, planning to execute him publicly after the Passover festivities. Nowhere in the New Testament does the intervention of Almighty God on behalf of His church appear any more timely and dramatic than in this chapter. With their friend on the throne, the Jewish hierarchy decided to exterminate Christianity; and there was no reason why they could not have succeeded, except for the intervention of the Father in heaven.

At the precise instant when one apostle was already dead, another imprisoned and condemned, and the entire Twelve proscribed by an all-powerful ruler acting as a Jewish deputy in the whole procedure, out of a desire to please his subjects, at that very moment God sent an angel to release Peter and shortly thereafter struck Agrippa dead.

The Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 11, p. 512 records this regarding Herod's death, "His sudden death in 44 A. D. . . . at Caesarea during the games in honor of Claudius was a disaster for Jewry, because with all his faults of sycophancy and ostentation he successfully kept the balance between Rome and the Jews and shown that the two could co-exist to the advantage of both." The final result of what took place when God sent an angel to destroy Herod Agrippa was realized some 20 years later when Titus and Vespasian destroyed Jerusalem.

The finger of God is clearly seen in this chapter.

Verse 1

"About that time . . ." Means about the time of Saul's and Barnabas' journey to Jerusalem with relief for the victims of the famine.

"Laid hands on some . . . to mistreat them . . ." This vigorous and fatal movement of the supreme authority in the land against the young church was exceedingly serious. The motivation was clearly that of pleasing the Jews and, if Herod Agrippa had proceeded indefinitely with that policy, there could never have been any end of it except the total destruction of Christianity.

Verses 2-3

It should be noted that the New Testament records no appointment of a successor to James. Why? He is still an apostle, still “reigning over the twelve tribes of (spiritual) Israel” as Jesus promised. (Matthew 19:28) Death never removed an apostle. It was not death but transgression that removed Judas. (1:25)

John Wesley, New Testament Commentary, in loco said; “So one of the brothers went to God the first, the other the last, of the apostles.” This has been viewed by some as a kind of mystical fulfillment of the desire of James and John to sit one of the right hand, the other on the left” of the Lord in His kingdom.

“Days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread . . .” This refers to the great annual Passover feast of the Jews; and, as it was at Passover that our Lord suffered, Peter must have associated his own imprisonment and impending death with the events of our Lord’s Passion.

Verse 4

“Four squads of soldiers . . .” Each “squad” was a group of four soldiers, so sixteen men were appointed to guard Peter.

“After the Passover . . .” This refers not to the Passover day, but to the whole celebration of Passover which lasted eight days.

“Bring him out before the people . . .” Herod planned a public execution of Peter, an event which the Jewish hierarchy and the Jerusalem rabble would have celebrated with the utmost enthusiasm. Things looked very bleak for the Christian faith at that moment.

Verse 5

“Prayer for him . . .” John Wesley, New Testament Commentary, Ibid. declares that, “The Greek intimates that is was incessantly kept up, always going on.” Thus it was a kind of perpetual prayer meeting that the church organized on behalf of Peter. If it is wondered why this was not done for James, the answer probably lies in the suddenness with which he was executed almost as soon as he was apprehended.

Verse 6

PETER'S CONDITION A TYPE OF SIN

The deliverance of Peter in this chapter was declared by Matthew Henry, *Ibid*, to “represent our redemption by Christ, which is not only the proclaiming of liberty to the captives, but the bringing them out of the prison house.” Peter was not only free from any unusual degree of sin, but he was a worthy member of the sacred Twelve, one of the most glorious characters earth ever knew.

It was his condition in Herod's prison that is referred to here. Note the following: Peter was a captive . . . all sinners are captives of Satan. (2 Timothy 2:24-26).

He was guarded . . . Satan likes to stand watch over his victims to prevent escape. Every Bible teacher knows that as soon as some young person had learned enough to obey the gospel and is ready to be baptized, someone over in another part of town will elect him president of a Sunday school class he hasn't attended in a year. It is the old strategy of Satan to post a guard and set a watch to keep a man from obeying the gospel even when he has already made up his mind to do it.

He was bound with two chains . . . Everyone in sin is bound with chains, even if they are nothing but the chains of habit. Procrastination from day to day becomes at last a chain stronger than iron.

He was asleep . . . Sleep is a state of insensitivity, inactivity, insecurity, and illusion. In the spiritual sense, every sinner is asleep. (Romans 13:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:6)

He was in darkness . . . Like the night of sin, the blackness of midnight had settled over Herod's prison.

He was naked . . . Peter had cast off his garment in order to be relieved of the suffocating heat of the dungeon. All sin and spiritual deficiency are nakedness. (Revelation 3:17-18)

He was condemned to death . . . This is the state of every unredeemed sinner on earth. (John 3:18)

Thus Peter's condition in that dungeon of Herod is remarkably suggestive of the sin-condition of every unredeemed person on earth. It is likewise true that his deliverance had overtones of applicability to the soul's conversion from sin.

Verse 7

Several things entered into Peter's deliverance.

- (1) There was a prayer meeting, mentioned later in Luke's narrative here, but already going on, and for days previously.
- (2) There was a messenger, in his case an angel of the Lord; but always there is a messenger when people are to be saved. "How shall they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:14)
- (3) There was light in that prison. The angel delivered the word of God to Peter; but the word of God is always light. (Psalm 119:105); and like the "light" delivered to every sinner by faithful preachers of the word of God, it consisted of a command to arise and act.

"Why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized and wash away your sins." (Acts 22:16)

- (4) The angel struck Peter's side and roused him saying, "Get up quickly and his chains fell off his hands." Thus, in an infinitesimal detail such as this, one sees the glorious truth of the word of God.

Verse 8

"And he did so . . ." Peter's response to God's message was exactly what it should have been. If the apostle had been like many today who are commanded to obey the word of God, he might have said, "Shhuuu, Angel, don't wake up the guard!" Or he might have said, "Well, thanks, Angel, I'll think about it! Some other time, I just might do what you say."

- (5) The fifth thing that entered into Peter's deliverance was the falling off of his chains. They fell off when he rose to obey the word of the angel.

The application is in this, that men's chains of sin will fall off when they rise and are baptized into Christ; and they will never fall off until this is done.

Verse 9

Think of the importance of following. Peter's chains had fallen off, but he was still in Herod's dungeon; and his deliverance would be meaningful only when the iron gates closed behind him as he went out.

Verse 10

The iron gate stands for death in this allegory. No man is safe from the fury of the evil one until death has ended his probation. To leave off following the Lord before death is to die in Satan's dominion and under his control. (Revelation 14:13) Peter did not leave off following the angel till the iron gate opened and closed behind him. That gate took twenty-five men to open and close it. It was the gate of a fortress so impregnable that soldiers were not even stationed to guard it. It did not need it.

“Which opened for them by itself . . .” The gate of death opened for Stephen who saw Jesus standing on the right hand of God (7:56); and every true Christian may expect the Lord to bless him in the hour of death. Its iron gates will open of their own accord. (Psalm 23)

It should be noted that Peter was destined to go through that iron gate in one of two ways. Had he passed through it the next morning it would have been in custody of Herod's soldiers on the way to his execution; but to go through it with an angel of God was a far different thing. So, also every Christian and every man will pass through the iron gate of death; but for some, alas it will be the gate to everlasting sorrow; and for others it will be the gate of everlasting joy.

Verse 11

“When Peter came to himself . . .” Peter's deliverance was so fantastic and contrary to all natural things that he found it nearly impossible to believe it himself until the press of events brought him to the full realization of what had happened, yes, happened.

Profane history records Peter's deliverance thus, “Herod Agrippa I was popular with his subjects, and his brief reign marked the peak of their material felicity. He did all in his power to crush the nascent Christian church, and after executing James the son of Zebedee, he arrested Peter, who escaped from prison!” (Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 11, p. 512)

The stupid and unreasonable conclusion by Herod that his own soldiers had released Peter was the only alternative to such a supernatural deliverance as actually occurred; and Herod's execution of his own guard proves only how determined that evil ruler was to deny the true explanation of Peter's escape.

Not very long after this, God would deliver another message to Herod which he would find no way to deny.

Verse 12

“When he realized this . . .” Peter no doubt recalled that when the angel had released him and the other apostles, he was commanded, not to leave Jerusalem, but to continue preaching in the temple. Peter honored that instruction here by not fleeing for safety, but by taking his place with the praying disciples.

“Many were gathered together and were praying . . .” This cannot mean that the entire church were gathered in a single residence, but that the place mentioned was one among many such gatherings throughout the city. The church at this time numbered many thousands of faithful Christians.

Verse 13

The scene that emerges here is one of affluence, if not wealth. Mary’s was a house large enough to contain a gathering for prayer meeting, having a courtyard and a gate attended by a servant.

Verse 14

This serving girl was as happy to see Peter as were any of the others; and, in her joy, she forgot to open the gate.

Verse 15

“It is his angel . . .” This verse proves that in the apostolical church the Christians believed that every person has a guardian angel; but it is uncertain what deductions should be made from this fact. Jesus apparently justified such a view by His reference to the angels of little children in Matthew 18:10, as being angels of the highest rank. The thinking of those who said this seems to be that “Since Herod has already killed Peter it must be his personal angel who is knocking at the gate.”

Peter kept on knocking, however; and the stunned hearers finally let him in.

Verse 16

This verse reveals emphatically that there had been no plot by the Christians to aid Peter in a prison break; for they were astounded by his appearance and unwilling, at first, to believe it.

Verse 17

“The Lord had led him out . . .” An angel, actually had done this, but he had acted as God’s servant; hence it was altogether correct to say that the Lord had done it.

“Report these things to James and the brethren . . .” This is not James the son of Zebedee, already slain by Herod (verse 2), but James the Lord’s brother, one of the church leaders in Jerusalem, and the author of the book of James.

The brethren . . .” has reference to Christians throughout the city, assembled in just such places as that in view here, and who were also praying for Peter.

“Went to another place . . .” The instructions just given by Peter regarding undertake such a task, but that he went to a place of greater security.

Verses 18-19

“He examined the guards . . .” Anyone familiar with how such examinations were conducted must know that if any of those men had really been involved in Peter’s escape, there could have been no way for them to conceal it. That sixteen men died to cover the blame of a few of these is incredible, as is also the monstrous notion that all sixteen were involved in it. No! The Lord delivered Peter, as Luke related.

“To Caesarea . . .” There at Caesarea, God would terminate the ability of Herod to harass and persecute the church. Herod was presiding over extensive games and ceremonies honoring the emperor at Caesarea in 44 A. D. In the midst of those festivities, Herod was cut down, as revealed in the next paragraph.

Verses 20-23

The following is taken from Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities and Wars of the Jews*, translated by William Whiston, p. 583, “When Agrippa had reigned three years over Judaea, he exhibited shows in honor of Caesar; on the second day of which shows he put on a garment made wholly of silver, truly wonderful, and came into the theater early in the morning, the silver of his garment reflecting the sun’s rays, spreading horror over those that looked. His flatterers cried, from one place, and another, that he was a god, adding, “Be merciful to us; for, although we have hitherto revered thee only as a man, yet shall we henceforth own thee as superior to mortal nature. Presently a severe pain arose

in his belly, and began in a most violent manner . . . Herod said, “I whom you call a god am presently commanded to depart this life . . . I am bound to accept what Providence allots.”

If we depend on what Josephus says, to the effect that Herod disapproved of the blasphemous compliments of his flatterers, then we have new light on what Luke means by, “He gave not God the glory . . .” This means that he would not give God the glory for releasing Peter, a refusal that could have originated in nothing else than his pride and stubbornness. Given the nature of the prison and the extent of Peter’s guard, Herod knew that God had delivered him; but he would not give God the glory, putting sixteen innocent men to death in order to emphasize his denial.

Verse 24

Over against all human interference, infidelity, unbelief, and opposition, there is opposed this Divine “BUT.” But the word of God grew and multiplied. The success of God’s plans is never in question. All that God intended shall surely come to pass.

Verse 25

“Fulfilled their mission . . .” This means that they accomplished the purpose of their journey, delivering to the elders in Jerusalem the bounty provided by the generosity of the Christians to relieve the victims of that famine in the reign of Claudius. The year 44 A. D. was the time of these events.

“John was also called Mark . . .” Luke’s mentioning of Saul of Tarsus, here is the introduction of another character who would figure prominently in Luke’s subsequent chapters of Acts—John Mark.

With the conclusion of this chapter, Luke had set the stage for the world-wide program of evangelism among the Gentiles; and he would at once move to the narrative of Paul’s first missionary journey.

CHAPTER 13

This chapter records the beginning of what is usually called Paul’s first missionary journey. First, there was the formal commission which sent Barnabas and Saul on their way (verse 1-3); then there is the account of their efforts on the island of Cyprus (verse 4-12); next is the record of John Mark’s

defection and the movement of Paul into Asia Minor (verses 13-16); then follows the record of Paul's address in Antioch of Pisidia (verses 17-43); and the record of still another sermon in the same city on the Sabbath day one week later (verses 44-52).

Verse 1

The group of men whose names appear here were very important, due to their being not only teachers but "prophets." J. R. Dummelow, Commentary on the Holy Bible, p. 833 said, "The gift of prophecy especially distinguished the apostolic from the sub-apostolic and later ages. It was widely diffused, being exercised by private Christians . . . It generally took the form of inspired exhortation or instruction, but was sometimes predictive . . . Friendly relations existed between Antioch and Jerusalem, the latter church sending accredited prophets and teaches to Antioch to aid in the work of evangelization."

The men mentioned in this verse were official prophets.

"Barnabas . . ." heads the list here. He was the uncle of John Mark who wrote the gospel and a brother of Mary whose home was the scene of Peter's reunion with the church mentioned in the last chapter.

Symeon that was called Niger . . ." The man is the same as Simon who bore the cross of Jesus and was the father of Alexander and Rufus. (Mark 15:21) "Niger" means "black;" but there is no greater necessity for making this term a description of Symeon's physical appearance than there is for alleging that Shirley Temple Black is black."

"Manaen of Cyrene . . ." A. C. Hervey, The Pulpit Commentary, Acts, p. 401 says, this person has "by some been falsely identified with Luke." "Foster-brother of Herod . . ." The Greek word thus rendered is not found elsewhere in the New Testament. A very close connection with the tetrarch Herod is indicated by the name.

"And Saul . . ." Luke's placement of this name last emphasizes the relative importance of these men at the beginning of the first missionary journey.

Verses 2-3

"They were ministering . . ." has reference, in all probability to the corporate worship of the Christians at Antioch, accompanied on this occasion by fasting, clearly indicating that worship is itself a "service" to the Lord

“The Holy Spirit said . . .” This expression occurs so often in Acts that the book has been called the Gospel of the Holy Spirit. G. H. C. MacGreggor, *Interpreters Bible*, p. 167 wrote, “It was through the inspired utterance of one of the prophets,” is how the Holy Spirit spoke.” In fact, the New Testament reveals this to have been the usual manner in which the Holy Spirit communicated God’s will to men since the days of the new covenant.

“When they had fasted . . .” Significantly, it was the entire church which participated in the sending forth of this great missionary team. F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, p. 261 wrote, “It is evident that the laying on of hands imparted no qualification to Barnabas and Saul which they did not already possess. By this means, the church, through its leaders, expressed fellowship with them. They were sent out by the whole church; and to the whole church they reported when they returned to Antioch.” (11:26)

“They sent them away . . .” We do not know if the Holy Spirit prescribed the route they took or not. It is doubtless true that many details were left to be decided by the prayerful best judgment of the missionaries. Barnabas, a native of Cyprus, would naturally have recommended the evangelization of his native land; and thus it is no surprise that their itinerary had Cyprus first on the list.

Verse 4

“Sent out by the Holy Spirit . . .” But, in the previous verse, it is clear that the church sent them forth; and this declares that what is done by the church of our Lord (in which the Spirit dwells) may be said also to have been done by the Holy Spirit; and so it is today. Preachers of the gospel sent into all lands by the church are no less sent by the Holy Spirit than were Barnabas and Saul.

“Seleucia . . .” This was the seaport outlet for Antioch, having derived its name from the Seleucid kings who built both the seaport and Antioch. It was some sixteen miles downstream from Antioch and some five miles above the mouth of the Orontes. Magnificent ruins of this once great city still exist in a remarkable state of preservation. (A. C. Hervey, *op. cit.*, p. 402)

Verse 5

“They reached Salamis . . .” This was the largest city on the eastern end of Cyprus, opposite from Seleucia, and within a hundred miles distance, being clearly visible on a clear day from Seleucia. (A. C. Hervey, *Ibid*) Something of

the immense size of this ancient city appears in the fact that the large Jewish population massacred some 240,000 of the Gentile inhabitants in a great uprising put down by Trajan's great general Hadrian, who himself later became emperor.

As a result, Hadrian expelled all Jews from the city; and J. W. Conybeare, *op. cit.*, p. 114 wrote, "Even if a Jew was accidentally wrecked on that inhospitable shore, he was instantly put to death." Those terrible conditions developed some fifty years after Barnabas and Saul preached there.

"The synagogues . . ." There were many of these attended by the vast Jewish population of Salamis; and it is significant that, from the very beginning, the gospel was preached "to the Jew first, and also to the Gentiles." (Romans 1:16)

"John as their helper . . ." B. W. Johnson, *The People's New Testament*, p. 470 said that, "John Mark probably acted as baptist," is a speculation that is supported by the fact that Paul did not usually do the baptizing personally. (1 Corinthians 1:14-17)

Continuing on from Salamis, Barnabas and Saul traversed the whole length of Cyprus to Paphos at the western extremity. It was a rich and populous island, the chief exports being copper and timber. The deity most generally worshiped on Cyprus was Aphrodite (Venus), the whole island being noted for its reprobate and debauchery.

Verses 6-7

The sad state of affairs on Cyprus is emphasized by the fact of such a practitioner of evil as Bar-Jesus enjoying the status of an advisor to the governor.

"Proconsul . . ." It was once a favorite conceit of critical antagonists of the New Testament that Luke erred in this title given Sergius Paulus; but the excavation of a coin with this title for the ruler of Cyprus refuted their error, not Luke's! (J. W. Conybeare, *op. cit.*, p. 123)

"Paphos . . ." This was the seat of the government on Cyprus, being the residence of the governor who was "a man of understanding." The "understanding attributed to Sergius Paulus referred to the fact of his seeking to hear the "word of God." Only they who thus seek to know the will of God may properly be credited with such an attribute as "understanding."

The fact of Bar-Jesus' having been a Jew suggests that Sergius Paulus had made inquiry into the beliefs of the Jews and may therefore be presumed to have had some knowledge of the sacred scriptures. As G. H. C. MacGreggor, op. cit., p. 169 admitted, "There would be nothing extraordinary in a Roman official having a Jewish teacher in his house."

Verse 8

"Elymas . . ." Bar-Jesus was the name this character received from his family; but his practice of the black arts had earned him another, "Elymas," which is "an Arabic word meaning sorcerer." (Robert Milligan, Analysis of the New Testament, Acts, p. 360)

"Was opposing them . . . seeking . . ." The action indicated here was not a single effort but a continuing one, wherein Elymas stubbornly opposed the gospel, trying in any way possible to preserve his own status as a trusted advisor of the governor. In the light of what followed, it is certain that lying and unscrupulous methods were used.

Verses 9-11

"Saul, who was also known as Paul . . ." H. Leo Boles, op. cit., p. 202 said, "The 'also' here does not mean that the name "Paul" was here given for the first time, but that he had always had it." "Paul" was the Gentile form of the name "Saul" and as Saul was here beginning his great work among the Gentiles, it was appropriate that the Gentile form of the name would be used henceforth by Luke, except on a few occasions referring to his previous life.

"You who are full of all deceit and fraud . . ." This strong denunciation of Elymas was announced by Paul through a revelation of the Holy Spirit; and the Divine authorization of Paul's condemnation of Elymas was at once evident in the miracle that confirmed it.

The rationalization of this miracle, G. H. C. MacGrrerggor, op. cit., p. 169 asserts that, "Probably the facts are that Paul denounced Bar-Jesus' spiritual blindness, and this led to the legend," of Paul's inflicting physical blindness upon him. Like every satanic falsehood, however, this one also carries its own refutation. In the matter of Elymas' seeking someone to lead him by the hand, the reality of the blindness is proved.

Paul was an inspired prophet and teacher, under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit, and there was no possibility whatever of any mistake or error on Paul's part. The judgment against Elymas was not that of Paul but of God Himself. "The hand of the Lord is upon you."

"A mist . . ." This word, found nowhere else in the New Testament, is another example of Luke's medical vocabulary. Hippocrates, the ancient Greek physician called the "Father of Medicine," used this word, A. C. Hervey, op. cit., p. 401 said, "To express a darkening and dimming of the eyes by a cataract or other disease."

"For a season . . ." shows that the unusual judgment against Elymas was not without its element of mercy. His blindness was not permanent.

Verse 12

"Believed . . ." is a synecdoche, a type of metaphor in which one of a related group of actions stands for all of them. The meaning here is that Paulus believed the gospel of Christ, repented his sins, confessed the Savior, and was baptized into Christ, becoming a Christian. Luke used this same figure in 16:34, in which place, after spelling out certain preconditions of salvation fulfilled by the jailer, he spoke of the jailer's compliance with all of them as his "having believed in God."

Verse 13

Two very important changes appear in this verse. "Barnabas and Saul," which until this point had been the designation of this missionary team, abruptly in this place gave way to "Paul and his company," or "Paul and Barnabas" as used generally in Acts afterward. Luke's coupling the defection of John Mark from the company with this marked change of leadership has been read by some as proof that John Mark's defection was due to his resentment of Paul's replacing his uncle Barnabas as the leading missionary.

This of course, is not certain; but neither is it impossible. Whatever was the cause of Mark's defection Paul disapproved of it and refused to take him on the next mission. (Acts 15:36-41)

"Perga in Pamphylia . . ." Luke skips over anything that might have taken place there, and focusing upon Paul's preaching in Antioch of Pisidia. Sir William Ramsey, *The Church in the Roman Empire*, p. 61ff, speculated that Paul

contacted malaria in low-lying Perga and promptly moved on to higher ground at Antioch (altitude about 3500') does not appear reasonable.

G. H. C. MacGreggor, *op. cit.*, p. 175 noted, "A sick man would surely have returned to Cyprus rather than undertake the strenuous Taurus passage; and, if Paul was in fact ill, it is more likely that the sickness came on in Antioch, compelling him to stay longer than he had anticipated." (Galatians 4:13)

Verses 14-16

The words "passing through" seem to indicate that the evangelistic company merely passed through Perga on the way to Antioch and that there had been no purpose of stopping there.

"Antioch of Pisidia . . ." Although a principal city of the district, this is not to be confused with Antioch of Syria. The latter was the home base for Paul's missionary labors, and Antioch of Pisidia was a distant outpost. Sir William Ramsey, *Ibid.*, p. 173 said at the time of Paul's preaching on this first tour, "The churches of Antioch, (Lystra, Derbe, and Iconium), though south of Galatia proper, were nevertheless in the province of Galatia, and could be spoken of as the Galatian churches . . . this grouping (of these places in Galatia) was abandoned after some three hundred years; and the name "Galatia" reverted to the northern part of the province. The wider meaning of Galatia was apparently forgotten until it was recovered largely through the research of Sir William M. Ramsey."

The synagogues throughout the Roman empire were the centers of Judaism; and, in many of these, there were devout souls "waiting for the kingdom of God," and this fact naturally directed the feet of the first Christian missionaries to the synagogues wherever they went.

The scene that emerges here at the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch is that of a devout congregations of Jews meeting on Sabbath days to read the sacred Scriptures and hoping to take advantage of any stimulating comment that might be provided by occasional visitors. It was a situation made to order for a preacher of Paul's character and ability.

"Motioning with his hand . . ." There was evidently some characteristic gesture that Paul used at the beginning of his discourses.

“You who fear God listen . . .” H. Leo Boles, *op. cit.*, p. 205 declared that, “The reading of the law and the prophets was first read in the synagogues till 163 B. C., when Antiochus Epiphanes prohibited it—then the reading of the prophets was substituted for it. When the Maccabees restored the reading of the law, the reading of the prophets continued also.”

PAUL’S ADDRESS

Paul’s address falls into three logical divisions:

- I. The historical background of the Messiah (verses 17-23), culminating in the coming of Jesus the Son of David.
- II. The proof that Jesus was indeed the promised deliverer (verses 24-37).
- III. An appeal to the people with a warning against rejecting Christ (verses 38-41).

Verse 17

“Chose our fathers . . .” God’s choice of Israel, making them the “chosen people,” was not a capricious or partial act. The purpose of choosing Israel was that “all the families of the earth” might be blessed (Genesis 12:3); but historically, the people of Israel did not appreciate this, falling into a state of self-righteousness in which they despised the Gentiles.

“Made the people great . . .” This exaltation resulted in a fantastic multiplication of their numbers and their deliverance from slavery imposed upon them by the Egyptians.

“With an uplifted arm . . .” has the meaning of irresistible power and dramatic deliverance imposed by God through His servant Moses in order to lead the people out of Egypt.

Verse 18

Paul stressed, not the rebellions and murmurings of the people, but the patience and forbearance of God.

Verse 19

“Seven nations . . .” These were: the Hittites, the Gergashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, “seven nations greater and mightier” than Israel. (Deuteronomy 7:1)

“Four hundred and fifty years . . .” It is not exactly clear what space of Israel’s history is covered by this period mentioned by Paul. There is no certainty at all

about the exact manner of this calculation; but the whole question is of little importance. There is the fact that Israel did not count some years when they were not ruled by judges. Even a Nazarite lost time if he did not comply with the law. (Numbers 6:12)

Verses 20-21

“They asked for a king . . .” This was secular Israel’s formal rejection of God as their king (1 Samuel 8:7), and from this initial rejection the whole of their subsequent history was influenced, resulting in their total rejection of the promised Messiah.

“For forty years . . .” The Old Testament does not give the length of Saul’s reign, but Josephus also sets it at forty years, covering eighteen years till the death of Saul and continuing 22 years afterward.

Verse 22

“After He had removed him . . .” The sovereign action of God in removing Saul and raising up David to replace him is stressed here.

“A man after my heart . . .” This verse has troubled men because of the gross sins which marred David’s life, notably the adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah the Hittite. Despite his sins, however, David never lost his love for God. He repented of his sins, acknowledged them, sought and received God’s forgiveness. Therefore, as is affirmed here is not David’s sinless perfection, but his continuity in covenant relationship with God.

Verse 23

“The Son of David . . .” was a popular designation for the promised Messiah. Paul moved at once to prove the Messiahship of Jesus, citing as proof; (1) the testimony of John the Baptist (verses 24-25); (2) the fulfillment of prophecy by His rejection (verses 26-29); and (3) His resurrection from the dead (verses 30-37).

Verses 24-25

Paul’s appeal to the testimony of John the Baptist in support of his thesis that Jesus is the Christ of God is doubtless abbreviated here. The testimony of John was extensive and included the following affirmations concerning our Lord:

- (1) That Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the world’s sin (John 1:29).

- (2) That Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit, (John 1:33).
- (3) That, having the bride, he was the Bridegroom, (John 3:29).
- (4) That He came from above and is above all, (John 3:31).
- (5) That He was sent of God and spoke God's words, (John 3:33).
- (6) That God had given to the Son all things, (John 3:35).
- (7) That he that believes the Son shall have eternal life, (John 3:36).
- (8) That he the obeys not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him, John 3:36).

Verses 26-29

“Sons of Abraham . . .” Paul here qualified this with the adjacent clause, “those among you that fear God,” indicating that not all of the stock of Abraham feared God. This distinction between the secular and the spiritual Israel would receive extensive treatment by Paul in Romans 9-11.

“Rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets . . .” The ignorance of Israel was a factor leading to their rejection of Christ. Despite the fact that they were not ignorant of His Messiahship, of His being the rightful heir of the temple and the extinct throne of Solomon, nor of His being a holy, just and righteous person, they were ignorant of the all-important fact that Jesus was God come in the flesh.

“Fulfilled these by condemning Him . . .” The prophets had clearly foretold the rejection of the Christ; therefore, their very action of crucifying the Lord proved that He was the promised Deliverer.

“Took Him down from the tree . . .” H. Leo Boles, op. ct., p. 211 says, “The Greek term here is ‘xulou’ and means not only tree, but wood.” The apostolic preachers stressed the offense of the cross, “Cursed is every one that is hanged on a tree.” (Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13)

“Laid Him in a tomb . . .” The antecedent of “they” in this passage would appear to be “dwellers in Jerusalem,” including both disciples of Jesus and the class who were His enemies, since it was the latter who condemned Him, His friends who took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb, and both classes who “fulfilled all things” that were written of Him.

Verse 30

The resurrection of Christ was the cornerstone of Paul's preaching. As proof of Jesus' resurrection, Paul offered the testimony of eyewitnesses and also the prophecies of the Old Testament which foretold it.

Verse 31

The post-resurrection appearances of Jesus were at least ten in number, perhaps many more; and, upon one occasion, He was seen by over five hundred brethren at one time. (1 Corinthians 15:6) It was the absolute certainty of the first-century Christians that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead which motivated the apostolic preachers and gave the faith of our Lord Jesus a sweeping victory throughout the world of that era.

Verses 32-33

"The second Psalm . . ." Some ancient manuscripts read "the first Psalm." Due to some third-century Psalters combining 1 and 2, making both together the first Psalm. (C. H. C. MacGreggor, op. cit., p. 180).

"**THOU ART MY SON . . .**" God's recognition of Jesus as His Son was emphatic upon the occasion of His baptism; but Jesus had been the only begotten Son from the time of His conception; and again, by the resurrection, God declared Him to be the Son of God with power. (Romans 1:4)

Verses 34-35

"Holy and sure blessings . . ." This comes from Isaiah 55:3 where "the everlasting Covenant" is mentioned as one of those blessings.

"To undergo decay . . ." This is an abbreviated reference to Psalm 16:10: "For Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Sheol, neither wilt Thou allow Thy Holy One to see the pit."

This Old Testament prophecy plainly foretold the resurrection of Christ, because only a resurrection could prevent corruption of one in the grave. Paul next mentioned the fact that since David's body had indeed decayed, the promise, therefore, did not apply to David but to David's greater Son, Jesus Christ. (Acts 2:29f)

Verses 36-37

Having clinched his argument regarding the resurrection of Christ by his appeal to the testimony of the eyewitnesses, and to the Old Testament prophecy of it, Paul proceeded to announce the availability of salvation from sin through faith in Christ.

Verses 38-39

“Through Him . . . forgiveness of sins . . .” The primary purpose of the coming of Christ and the Christian gospel is that men may be forgiven of their sins. How reprehensible is the conduct of the secular church in our generation which has perverted this purpose in the pursuit of what they believe to be social and economic gains. The problem regards “remission of sins,” not living conditions.

“Everyone who believes . . .” Here again is the great synecdoche meaning simply “everyone who believes, repents, confesses Christ, and is baptized for the remission of sins.”

“From which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses . . .” The antecedent of “which” is “all things” making the meaning to be that “all things” fail of justification under the Law of Moses.

“Through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you . . .” The Pauline doctrine of justification, as set forth fully in Romans, makes the final grounds of it to be the perfect faith and obedience of the Son of God. The justification is “in Christ,” an expression (or its equivalent) which occurs no less than 169 times in Paul’s writings. No man can be justified in his own name, or by his own achievement. It is not as Joe Bloke, or John Doe, that any man can be saved but “as Christ,” “in Christ,” and as fully identified with Christ.

Verses 40-41

The quotation here is from Habakkuk 1:5; and the admonition is to the effect that the unique, startling, and amazing facts of the gospel should not be grounds of the people’s rejecting them.

Verses 42-43

Paul’s great sermon had fully captured the attention of many who were inclined to accept Christianity, and the conversations regarding this continued, apparently, throughout the whole day. An appointment was made for Paul to

speak again in that same synagogue on the Sabbath a week later. In the meantime, however, Satan would stir up opposition to the truth.

Verses 44-45

“The whole city . . .” indicates that many Gentiles also were present; and the Jewish leaders, long accustomed to the notion that they alone had the truth, were infuriated and filled with jealousy. They did not hesitate to contradict Paul and utter blasphemous words directed, presumably, against the Lord Jesus.

Verses 46-47

“Spoken to you first . . .” The invariable rule, both of Christ and of the apostles who delivered His message to men, was “to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” Jesus twice fed the multitudes, the first being a great Jewish throng, the second being composed largely of Gentiles.

“Judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life . . .” Nothing could have been said which would more completely have “turned off” Paul’s hearers. It was simply not in their thinking that salvation could be offered to any except their own race. What is so amazing about this is that there were many Jewish Scriptures which plainly indicate that through them, that is through the Jews, God intended to redeem the Gentiles also. In Romans Paul cited Hosea 1:10, 2:23, and Isaiah 65:2 as indicative of God’s purpose of saving Gentiles.

Verses 48-49

Thus success attended the campaign in Antioch; but with that success came the bitter opposition of the Jews who simply determined not to have it so.

“As many as had been appointed to eternal life believed . . .” Robert Milligan, *Analysis of the New Testament*, p. 364 said, this means that, “As many as were disposed to accept God’s plan, according to which they had been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, believed.”

Before the world was, God ordained that people who would hear His word and submit their will to His would receive eternal life, and that those who would not do this could not receive eternal life.

The ordination in this place having reference, not to individuals at all, but to classes of people. Every individual ever born has the right of decision with regard to which class of persons will be his own.

Verse 50

This verse indicates that the Jews were able to manipulate the political and social leaders of the city to bring pressure against the preachers of the gospel.

“Devout women of prominence . . .” Don DeWelt, *Acts Made Actual*, p. 184 said, “They were probably the wives of the chief men of the city and thus influenced their husbands to promote a general persecution.”

“Drove them out of their district . . .” The campaign was successful in that it resulted in the expulsion of the missionaries; but this did not in the least deter the activities of men like Paul and Barnabas.

Verses 51-52

“Shake off the dust . . .” Jesus had commanded, “And as for those who do not receive you, when you depart from that city, shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them.” (Luke 9:5) The symbolism of this was a warning that the rejection of the message they had preached would have eternal consequences for those who refused to hear them.

“Filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit . . .” The opposition and the eventual expulsion of the preachers from Antioch, a true church of Christ had nevertheless been planted. The truth of God then had roots in Antioch of Pisidia; and the jealous fury of the opponents could do nothing against it. Christianity was on the march!

CHAPTER 14

This chapter concludes the account of the first missionary journey. It concludes with an account of their return journey to Syrian Antioch and the report of their labors to the sponsoring church.

The length of time Paul and company had spent in Antioch of Pisidia included at least the whole winter of A.D. 46-47, due to the severe winters which made traveling nearly impossible for the ancients. Between Antioch and Iconium, a distance of 90 miles lay rough mountainous terrain, Antioch having an altitude of 3500 feet and Iconium having an altitude of 3300 feet.

Paul’s labors took place in the period A. D. 45-50. Paul stayed long enough in Pisidia Antioch to teach and firmly establish the church there.

Verse 1

ICONIUM

Greek mythology relates that King Nannakos ruled there, that an oracle warned him of a world-wide flood, which he vainly sought to avert through tears and entreaties to the gods. The flood came; and when the waters receded, Prometheus and Athena made images of mud into which the winds breathed life; so was the earth repopulated. The words “images” in Greek (eikones) gives us the English “icon”; and similarly Iconium found a name. Such a legend of course was grounded in the fact that the flood mentioned in Genesis actually occurred.

Iconium stood on the edge of the plateau, well-watered, a wealthy and productive region.

“They entered the synagogue . . .” This particular synagogue in Iconium had an unusually large number of Gentiles in attendance, many of whom were also proselytes; and it provided a major opportunity for Paul.

W. R. Walker, *Studies in Acts*, II, p. 14 commented, “It was easier to interpret utterances concerning Christ to the Gentiles,” because the Gentiles, unlike the Jews, were not blinded by the malignant carnal nationalism which dominated Jewish thought and was the prime reason for their rejection of Christ.

“And spoke in such a manner . . .” Not merely preaching, but preaching in such a manner as to reach men’s hearts, characterized the work of the apostles. Don De Welt, *Acts Made Actual*, p. 185 said, “We would do well to follow closely the message and method of the apostles that we too might “so speak” as to reach the hearts of those to whom we preach.”

“A great multitude . . . believed . . .” Wherever such an expression is used in the New Testament, “believed” is a figure of speech standing for all that is involved in becoming a Christian. Such a comment as the following demonstrates the religious error which fails to take this into account. R. Tuck, *Pulpit Commentary*, p. 457 said, “The Christian missionaries had learned to declare that faith, and faith alone was the ground of admission to God’s kingdom . . . Barnabas and Paul found the faith condition quite sufficient . . . and required no other of their Gentile converts.”

If such a comment is true, why did Paul command the Philippian jailer to be baptized at midnight? (16:33) There are two uses of “believed” in the New Testament, one as a synecdoche for the primary steps of obedience, and the other as an identification of one of those steps. It is used in the first of these senses here.

In such an expression as “faith alone,” which is both unscriptural and anti-scriptural, there is a clear undeniable perversion of the word of God. The only mention of “faith alone” in the entire New Testament affirms that men are not justified “by faith only.” (James 2:24)

Verse 2

“The Jews who disbelieved . . .” Not faith alone, but faith and obedience are included in the meaning here. It is impossible to understand “believing” in such passages as anything other than a shorthand for believing and rendering obedience to the gospel. The apostle John said, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life.” (John 3:36)

Verse 3

It was the extensive Gentile character of Iconium which resulted in the “signs and wonders” God performed there by the hands of the apostles, thus “confirming the word” as had been promised. (Mark 16:20)

The Jews already professed to receive the Scriptures as the word of God; but the Gentiles knew nothing of the Scriptures, or at least but little; hence the appearance of signs. Don De Welt, *op. cit.*, p. 186 wrote, “It is of interest to note that each time miracles are mentioned they are associated with apostles, or persons on whom the apostles had laid hands. Never do we hear of the Christians in these towns working miracles through their great faith.” Some have vainly supposed that if modern Christians only had faith like the apostles they could perform miracles of healing; but such a view does not take account of the purpose for which miracles were given in the apostolic age. The miracles in view here were God’s way of “bearing witness to the word of His grace,” and were in no sense merely for the benefit of the suffering.

Verse 4

“The city was divided . . .” In Luke 12:51-53 Jesus had clearly foretold the divisions that would inevitably follow the faithful preaching of the word. This

division invariably issues from the polarization of men's hearts, either toward the Lord or against Him. The two divisions here are the Christians and the non-Christians, with the latter probably being the majority.

"The apostles . . ." Paul and Barnabas were not apostles in the sense that the Twelve were, the term being used here in a secondary sense. The name "apostle" is here applied to Paul for the first time in the New Testament. Robert Milligan, *Analysis of the New Testament*, p. 365, defined the secondary meaning of "apostles" in the New Testament as "missionaries or messengers."

Verses 5-7

The increasing success of the gospel finally precipitated the riotous and illegal action in view here. Sir William M. Ramsay, *op. cit.*, p. 129 referred to this impending mob action as "a riotous and illegal conspiracy." When the apostles learned of it, they yielded ground, as the Master had commanded, and fled to Laconia.

The climate for gospel preachers proved to be no better in Laconia than it had been in Iconium and Antioch. The pagan population was a fierce, primitive breed. E. H. Plumptre, in *Elliott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 89 wrote, "The very name Laconia, interpreted traditionally as Wolf-land (the local legend derived it from Lycaon who had been transformed into a wolf) faithfully represented the character of the inhabitants."

It is a tribute to the Christian gospel that such a population should have responded to the truth, giving to Christianity no less a person than Paul's friend Timothy.

LYSTRA

Lystra was the first stop, being only about eighteen or twenty miles eastward from Iconium; but the distance was not measured merely in miles, for it lay in a different political division of Galatia; and the people spoke a different language. This was a primitive place, singled out by Augustus as a colony, probably for the defense of the southeastern frontier of the Galatian province. E. M. Blaiklock, *op. cit.*, p. 31 said, "Throughout the countryside the old Anatolian village-system prevailed, and the native language of Laconia was spoken. Lystra was the market-town, with streets crowded by the local peasantry on market and festal days."

There was a temple dedicated to Zeus before the gates of the city; and the people had faith in a legend recorded by Ovid to the effect that the gods had once visited their district.

Verses 8-10

A certain school of critics, intent on establishing a theory that Luke invented certain incidents to force a parallel between the lives of Peter and Paul, liking to point out similarities between this episode and the healing of the impotent man at the Gate Beautiful by Peter (3:3ff); but there are monumental differences. Here the healed person had great faith; there the inference is that the impotent man had none at all. Here the man was listening to Paul's teaching; there the beggar was intent on alms alone. There Peter professed poverty; here there was no mention of poverty. There the miracle was followed by Peter's sermon, here the mob tried to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas.

In performing the signs of an apostle, Paul had observed that the impotent man was attentive to the message, obviously believing it; and, as Paul had doubtless made many references to Christ's healing all manner of diseases, it suddenly appeared to Paul that the condition of the man's heart was such that he could be healed; hence the command and the startling result. It is a mistake to view the man's faith as enabling Paul; it enabled him to receive God's blessing through Paul.

Verses 11-12

"Saying in the Lycaonian language . . ." This accounts for the fact that Paul and Barnabas were not aware of the intention of the people until later. F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 291 said, "The crowd's use of Lycaonian explains why Paul and Barnabas did not grasp what was afoot until preparations to pay them divine honors were well advanced."

Some very important deductions derive from this inability of the apostles to understand the Lycaonian dialect. H. Leo Boles, *op. cit.*, p. 223 said, "This shows that the gift of tongues did not give the apostles power to speak or to understand all dialects."

Another thing in this episode is the evident belief of that primitive people in the supernatural. "The gods . . . have come down to us . . ." E. H. Plumptre, *op. cit.*, p. 90 wrote, "No such cry could have been possible in the great cities where

the confluence of a debased polytheism and philosophical speculation had ended in utter skepticism.”

“Calling Barnabas, Zeus . . .” Barnabas was ascribed the chief honor. E. Blaiklock, *op. cit.*, p. 32 wrote, “Zeus was the patron deity of the Lycaonian countryside, as indicated by archeological evidence strikingly confirming the narrative of Luke. Two inscriptions unearthed from Lystra record the dedication of a statue to Zeus, and make mention of “the priests of Zeus.”

“And Paul Hermes, because he was the chief speaker . . .” The Greek has Hemes instead of Mercury; and the same inscriptions mentioned above link the name of Hermes with that of Zeus.

Verse 13

That enterprising priest of Zeus was what may be described as being “on the ball;” if a miracle had occurred, as indeed there had, he would channel influence of it into the worship of his deity.

“Oxen and garlands . . .” This is an interesting glimpse of pagan worship. The beasts to be sacrificed were decorated, their horns gilded, and their necks circled with white ribbons and other decorations. Alexander Campbell, *Acts of Apostles* p.98 said, “The ancient poets Ovid and Virgil both sang of this:

Rich curling fumes of incense feast the skies,
A hecatomb of voted victims dies,
With gilded horns and garlands on their head.
In all the pomp of death to the altar led.—Ovid.

The victim ox, that was for altars priest,
Trimmed with white ribbons and with garlands drest,
Sank of himself with the god’s command,
Preventing the slow sacrificer’s hand.—Virgil

Verse 14

“Barnabas and Paul heard of it . . .” has the meaning of “when they became aware of what was taking place. The rending of the garments was a traditional reaction to blasphemy; and the offering of sacrifice to mortal men was thus interpreted by Paul and Barnabas. Being unable to get attention otherwise, they

frustrated the ill-conceived plan by running among the people and crying out as in the next verse.

Verses 15-17

This appeal to God as revealed in nature was appropriate for a pagan audience with little or no knowledge of the word of God; and there are a number of very important points in this speech. The fact that God is one, a unity, and He created everything; also the fact of being, not a dead or inanimate god such as Zeus, but a living God; and likewise the goodness of God as revealed in His providential care of mortals—all these concepts appear in Paul's address here.

It is appropriate to note the intimations of Paul's writings in his epistles are suggested by the words here. The reference to their "turning from these vain things to the living God" is like 1 Thessalonians 1:9; God's suffering "the nations to walk in their own ways" is like Romans 3:25, etc.

Verse 18

W. R. Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 16 observed, "The sacrifices here proposed were those accorded the gods whom they were supposed to be; and the preservation of the institution of sacrifice among heathen peoples in all ages is evidence that God originally commanded sacrifices to be offered unto Himself. Despite the fact of the institution of sacrifices having been perverted and changed in many ways, nevertheless, no one can explain its universality on any other ground than that here suggested."

Although Luke did not mention Paul's success at Lystra, there were, nevertheless, some who accepted the gospel. H. Leo Boles, *op. cit.*, p. 226 pointed out that, "Among the more conspicuous converts were the devoted Jewess, Lois, her daughter Eunice, and the young Timothy." (2 Timothy 1:5)

Verse 19

The enemies of the gospel traveled a distance of more than a hundred miles in order to oppose the truth. It would be commendable if advocates of the truth would be as diligent. J. W. McGarvey, *Commentary on Acts*, p. 44 said, "It is difficult to comprehend the malignity of those Jews." It is not difficult, however, to understand their *modus operandi*. They would first have enlisted the aid of the priest of Zeus, already infuriated by the defeat of his self-serving device of offering sacrifice to the apostles; then, they would have related how the apostles

had been compelled to leave both Antioch and Iconium, alleging, as they did of Jesus, that the wonders of the people had seen more accomplished by the power of Satan. The same mob that would have sacrificed to them as gods one day was ready to murder them on the next day.

“They stoned Paul . . .” This was a favorite method of execution with the Jews and indicates their predominance in this attempted murder. There is no suggestion whatever of any formal charge, or any trial.

“And dragged him out of the city . . .” E. H. Trenchard, *A New Testament Commentary*, p. 316 commented that, “There was no need for Luke to stress the fickleness, cruelty and violence of men living under demon-controlled systems of idolatry. The simple statements of two verses (18, 19) reveal both the hatred of religious enemies and the crazy reactions of the Lystra mob, who stoned the “god” of yesterday and dragged him out of the city.”

The Jews who took part in this had no scruple against profaning the streets of a pagan city by such a murderous act; but in their perpetration of an identical thing in the martyrdom of Stephen, they scrupulously refrained from killing him within the city. Satan had indeed blinded such men.

Verse 20

Why was Paul stoned, and not Barnabas? The Jews were more discerning than the pagans of Lystra; the latter might indeed suppose Barnabas to be the king of the gods and Paul only a spokesman; but the Jews knew better, recognizing in Paul the greatest advocate of Christianity that was produced by the apostolical age.

“And the next day . . .” Derbe was a good many miles farther toward the border of Galatia; and one is amazed at the physical stamina and endurance exhibited by a man who, having been stoned “to death” one day, was able to travel such a distance on the next. Surely the Lord must have strengthened him.

DERBE

For many years scholars have presumed that Derbe was about “twenty miles” from Lystra; but “The New Bible Dictionary, op. cit., p. 306 has this, “The site of Derbe was identified in 1956 by M. Balance at Kerti Huyuk, 13 miles NNE of Karaman (Laranda), some 60 miles from Lystra (whence Acts 14:20b must

evidently be translated, “and on the morrow he set out with Barnabas for Derbe.”)

Derbe was situated almost on the border of eastern Roman Galatia; any further east would have taken them into the kingdom of Antiochus. Of the “many disciples” recruited in Derbe, Paul’s fellow-traveler Gaius (20:4) is the only one whose name has come down to us.

Verse 21

The verse before us summarizes an extensive and successful preaching experience in Derbe, after which the missionary party backtracked, visiting again the cities they had already evangelized.

The reason for Paul’s determination to revisit the cities of South Galatia, was for the purpose of strengthening the Christians and ordaining elders in the congregations which they had established.

Verse 22

“Strengthening the souls . . .” What is meant here is simply that Paul desired to communicate encouraging and helpful admonition to the new converts God had given through the preaching. Living, as they did, in a wild, pagan society, they must surely have needed such strengthening as could come only from one like Paul.

“Continue in the faith . . .” “The faith” here has the meaning of “Christianity.” Many of Paul’s expressions regarding salvation “through faith” or “by faith” have no bearing whatever on the Lutheran heresy of redemption by “faith only,” but mean simply, that men are saved through, or by, Christianity, or the Christian religion.

“Through many tribulations we must enter . . .” “Must” in focus here is the necessity of sufferings, persecutions, etc. for those who will obey the gospel and enter God’s kingdom. The lives of the Christians in these Galatian cities afforded ample proof of this, as did also that of the great apostle who had brought them the message of redemption. We might paraphrase Paul’s words thus: These tribulations we are suffering as a consequence of our entering God’s kingdom are normal and necessary.

“We must enter the kingdom of God . . .” G. H. C. MacGreggor, *op. cit.*, p. 192 thought that the tribulations in this passage are “those which are to precede the end” and that the kingdom of God carries its “eschatological meaning.”

We do not believe this at all. There is nothing in Paul’s writings, which support the notion that he expected the end of time in his lifetime. Paul neither believed nor taught, any “quick return” of Jesus.

Paul wrote certain young Christians whom he had converted, telling them that: “He delivered us . . . and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.” (Colossians 1:12-13) However, this is not to deny the reality of a future and final phase of God’s kingdom which is associated with the eventual triumph of Jesus over all things.

Verse 23

“Elders for them in every church . . .” This is the first mention of appointing elders in the New Testament, and the fundamental truth of there being a plurality of elders in each congregation is thus evident from the very first.

“Appointed . . .” Arguments based on this word which would require elders to be voted upon are not valid. G. H. C. MacGreggor, *Ibid.*, p. 193 noted, “The word “appointed” means literally “chose by show of hands” and, strictly speaking, should imply some form of popular voting. But it had come to be used of choice in general without reference to the means.”

The New Testament simply does not bind upon Christians any certain method of choosing either elders or deacons. It was Paul who appointed the elders in these churches, and it would be a mistake to suppose he yielded the right of choice to ignorant Gentile congregations, described by him as “weak, base, despised, and foolish,” without taking the utmost precautions and providing firm guidance for them. H. Leo Boles, *op. cit.*, p. 209 said, “Any method (of appointing elders) which promotes unity and does not violate a principal may be used.”

ELDERS

E. H. Trenchard, *op. cit.*, p. 317 wrote that, “It is widely agreed that during the apostolic age, elder=bishop (overseer)=pastor and that there was a plurality of these in each local church, forming the presbytery. There are no less than six

New Testament words which refer to exactly the same office, that of elder mentioned here.

Bishop (episkopos) translated overseer

Presbyter translated elder

Pastor translated shepherd

Paul said, "The overseer must be above reproach as God's steward." (Titus 1:7) One of the most significant things regarding Paul's appointment of elders in these churches is that of their inexperience. None of these appointed had been Christians any longer than two or three years at the most, and some of them, no doubt, a much shorter time. In the light of this, those settled congregations of our own day who "operate" for ten or thirty years without naming any elders are proving by their failure their unwillingness to follow the pattern in evidence here. The usual excuse is that "none are qualified;" and if it is supposed that absolute perfection in meeting the qualifications Paul himself laid down for this office is required of all who may be appointed, it may be that none were ever qualified in the history of the church.

The overriding commandment is "to appoint;" the "qualifications" are guidelines; and to make the guidelines an excuse for nullifying the commandment is sinful.

"Prayed with fasting . . ." Despite the fact of having no formal or ceremonial facts prescribed for Christians, either by the Lord or by any of the apostles, it is quite evident that fasting was an approved device for deepening spirituality and that even apostles observed occasions of fasting. There is no reason why devout persons in any age should not follow their example.

Verses 24-25

Sir William Ramsay, *op. cit.*, p. 133 said, "Paul and Barnabas crossed Taurus (probably in A. D. 48, certainly in the summer season) and returned through Pamphylia to Syrian Antioch."

Luke here tells us nothing of the success of the missionaries in Perga, only that they spoke the word of the gospel there. Perga was situated inland a few miles on the Cestrus River and Attalia likewise on the Catarrhactes, two of the three rivers crossing the Pamphylian Plain. Ancient cities were often located

upstream to diminish the attacks of pirates. Paul finding no ship at Perga simply crossed overland to Attalia and sailed from there.

Verse 26

This return to the sponsoring church must have been a dramatic and exciting event. It is possible that no word had been received of their labors. A great throng gathered to hear the report of what God had done through his servants on that first journey.

Verse 27

“Opened a door of faith to the Gentiles . . .” The mission had been a success. There were now a number of Gentile churches holding forth the truth of God in pagan Gentile territory; and the evangelization of the “uttermost parts of the earth” was firmly under way.

Verse 28

Much of the time between A. D. 45 and A. D. 50 is covered by this first journey. Robert Milligan, *op. cit.*, p. 367 said, “How much of the time was devoted to the mission, and how much to the labors in Antioch, we have no means of knowing.”

The length of this journey was no less than 1300 miles some 500 miles of this being by water, and the other 800 miles having taken them over some of the roughest and most dangerous terrain on earth. It is not known if Paul had the advantage of any animal-powered transportation or not; but the wildness of most of the terrain, the absence of good roads, or of any roads at all, plus the total absence of any hint to the contrary, must allow the conjecture to stand that Paul and company negotiated the whole excursion on foot. Marvelous were the sufferings and labors of that dauntless company who thrust themselves into wild and inhospitable regions of that ancient world for the purpose of preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ and salvation in His holy name.

CHAPTER 15

The first thirty-five verses of this chapter relate the event which has been called The Jerusalem Council, where, it has been alleged, the mother church convened a formal session to pass on the preaching of the apostle Paul,

especially with regard to the relationship between the Law of Moses and the Christian gospel.

This so-called council can never be understood without reference to another report of it in Galatians 2:iff, delivered in that epistle by the apostle Paul himself. The widespread disagreement among scholars, many of them denying that the two reports are of one event, is due to false assumption regarding the nature of this event in Jerusalem.

It is rather a complicated question; but the strong feeling expressed here is that there is but one event, Paul's Galatian letter being therefore supplementary information to what Luke gives in this chapter.

First of all, the purpose of meeting in Jerusalem was that of correcting the religious position of the majority in the church, including, it may be presumed, most if not all of the apostles, as well as James the Lord's brother. The notion that Paul needed their approval in any manner is wrong, except in the limited sense of his hoping to retain the unity of the Christian movement. Paul did not need the "council"; they needed him.

THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

This event in Acts is the same as that in Galatians 2 for the following reasons:

- (1) Paul was converted in 37 A. D. If Luke's placement of this event is assumed to be chronological, then the date of it must be in the vicinity of 50 A.D. This corresponds exactly with the "fourteen years" following Paul's conversion (Galatians 2:1), especially if the inclusive reckoning followed by New Testament writers is taken into account, giving a net thirteen years after the year 37.
- (2) The variations in the accounts, which are somewhat startling, derive from Paul's reporting in Galatians some conversations which took place in Jerusalem between himself and James, Cephas and John, evidently before the formal meeting was convened.
- (3) Although the brethren appointed Paul to go up to Jerusalem, it was God who sent him there (Galatians 2:2), not to permit the council to pass on Paul's preaching, but to in order to correct the shameful failure of the apostles and elders in that city to admit the Gentiles, without

restrictions, into the Christian fellowship. In Galatians, Paul flatly affirmed that,

“They . . . contributed nothing to me; but on the contrary seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel . . . gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship.” (Galatians 2:6-9)

Paul had fully as much authority as anyone in the Jerusalem church. Paul went up there to correct them and to bring conciliation, and to bring them into line with the will of God, not the other way around.

The idea of the Jerusalem church having jurisdiction over what Paul delivered, as gospel, to the elders at Lystra and Derbe is foreign to the New Testament. Paul was the instrument by which the Holy Spirit guided the apostles (the Twelve) into all truth, and Jesus had promised, especially on the question of the relationship between Judaism and the church of Christ.

- (4) The book of Galatians was Paul’s first epistle, written almost immediately after the meeting in Jerusalem, hence his saying to them, “I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him.” (Galatians 1:6)
- (5) The objection that Paul assumes for himself the sole credit for converting the Galatians, “elbowing Barnabas out of his share of their conversion, overlooks the fact that Paul was “the spokesman,” and as such could truthfully say he had converted them without denying credit to anyone.

It was Paul who appointed the elders; it was Paul who was stoned; it was Paul alone, of the entire apostolical world at that time, who was preaching the true gospel (on the Gentile question); and, besides all this, Barnabas had been carried off into dissimulation with Peter and others of that conviction, this alone being sufficient grounds for not injecting Barnabas’ name as one who had “converted” them.

Verse 1

“And some men came down . . .” These were the same persons mentioned by Paul in Galatians 2:12 who came “from James.”

“You cannot be saved . . .” It appears at this point that the greatest doctrinal threat in its whole history here confronted the young faith. James was the equivalent of the “leading elder” in Jerusalem, especially influential as the

brother of the Lord; and, presumably, he was supported, or at least not opposed, by the apostles.

F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, p. 303, thought that these men from James exceeded their commission by thus making observance of the Mosaic law mandatory for all Christians; and James declared that “no such commandment” was given them (verse 24). He seems, however, to have tolerated their views until this crisis.

In any case, if God had not corrected the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, the entire Christian religion would have been frustrated and perverted. At best, it could thenceforth have been nothing but a Jewish sect, preaching the resurrection of Christ, of course, but nevertheless relying on the Law of Moses for salvation. A large company of Pharisees who had become Christians would soon have dominated and destroyed it.

Verse 2

“Had great dissension . . .” Paul would never have yielded to the Judaizing teachers, even if the whole Jerusalem church had backed them up, this being true because Paul had received a direct revelation from Jesus Christ covering the whole question. Thus, what is in view here is a very sharp clash between Paul’s position and the false position of the men who had come from Jerusalem.

“The brethren determined that Paul . . . should go up . . .” Although it is here said that the brethren appointed Paul and company to this task, Galatians 2:2 plainly says that Paul went up “by revelation.”

“And certain others of them . . .” One of these was Titus (Galatians 2:1), who might have been a brother of Luke; and this would account for Titus being nowhere mentioned in Luke’s writings.

This group almost certainly included the apostle Peter also; for as F. F. Bruce, *Ibid*, said, “Peter was in residence at Antioch when the Judean emissaries arrived.” Paul and Peter clashed over the issue so gravely threatening to disrupt Christian unity.

“Should go up . . . concerning this issue . . .” It should be noted that Luke carefully refrained from saying that they were to go to Jerusalem to settle the question, leaving in view the fact that, through Paul’s revelation, they were going up to settle the Jerusalem church on the right side of the question. The

stubborn insistence of the Judean emissaries made it clear that some in the Jerusalem church intended to control the churches everywhere, compelling them to conform to their own Judean bias. It was necessary that strong action be taken against the source of it in Jerusalem.

Verse 3

These places were on their way from Antioch to Jerusalem, and the Gentile converts rejoiced in the strong action of the Antioch church in pressing the evangelism of the Gentiles. It should be noted here that “the church” paid the expenses and furnished the supplies for this trip.

Verses 4-5

“The Pharisees who had believed . . .” Here is identified the seat of the mischief. Their love of the forms and ceremonies of Judaism had been brought with them into the church; and it may be assumed that for some considerable time they had been working to graft their own system into Christianity. Not only had they corrupted practically the whole of the church in Judaea, but the recently established churches in Galatia had been visited and corrupted sufficiently to call forth Paul’s vehement letter to the Galatians.

The representatives they sent down to Antioch probably expected a quick victory there also; but instead of a victory they suddenly confronted the dauntless Paul who challenged them, defeated them, and proceeded to Jerusalem where he reversed the victory they had already won there. Aside from Christ Himself, Christianity owes more to Paul than to any other.

Verse 6

“To look into this matter . . .” This is different from “to decide,” there being no evidence whatever that this so-called council “decided” anything except that they would “trouble not” the Gentiles who had turned to God. (Verse 19)

Verse 7

Peter here has reference to the events related in chapter 10, where is recorded the conversion of Cornelius, Peter at that time had acted in good faith, baptizing Cornelius and his household without any thought of circumcision and law-keeping; but it is evident that the cunning Pharisees, in efforts to bring them all to their viewpoint, began by stressing the social issue of eating with the

uncircumcised, but moving quickly afterward to the hard position of demanding full obligations to Moses' law as a condition of salvation.

True, Peter had eaten with Cornelius; but, through social pressure, the Pharisee-Christians were able to compromise him by causing dissimulation. When all were gathered together in Jerusalem, and after many discussions, Peter's basic understanding of God's will, fortified by his rugged character, enabled him to rise up, as he did here, and pull the rug out from under the whole Pharisaical conspiracy.

Verses 8-9

"Faith . . ." here means "the Christian faith" as distinguished from the Law of Moses and does not mean "faith" as distinguished from repentance and baptism. This is a frequent New Testament usage of the word.

"Made no distinction between us and them . . ." This is one of the cornerstone doctrines of Christianity. God has only one plan, one system of human salvation, there being no partiality, no special favors, no special devices favoring any man, race, or nation.

The whole book of Romans was written to develop the theme of God's intrinsic righteousness in treating all men and nations alike. "There is no distinction!" (Romans 3:22)

Verses 10-11

What a profound difference between Peter's teaching here and the hesitancy and dissimulation so shortly before this in Antioch! The circumstances of such a dramatic change most surely included Paul's withering denunciation of Peter at Antioch. (Galatians 2:11ff)

Peter "the rock" was certainly out of character as this great issue boiled to a climax in Antioch; but in this scene he "came to himself." Paul's key part in bringing Peter to his senses was, in context, an act of God Himself. A rooster did it the night Jesus was betrayed; but it took Paul to do it here.

"You put God to the test . . . placing a yoke . . ." The "you" in this passage is "the apostles and elders" indicating the near-unanimous victory the Pharisee-Christians had accomplished in Jerusalem. However, by the time they came down to the formal part of the council, the victory had already been won. Peter had already been won over to a complete endorsement of Paul's preaching in its

totality. That approval and endorsement he courageously announced to all, declaring strongly that their refusal of Paul's viewpoint would "tempt" God. Next there was a strong presentation by Paul and Barnabas.

Verse 12

"Kept silent . . ." This thunderbolt just delivered by Peter completely silenced the Pharisaical Christian party, leaving the body of the Jerusalem church, assembled for the occasion silent and ready to give full attention to the report of Barnabas and Paul.

JAMES' SUMMARY

Verse 13-18

"James . . ." This was James the Lord's brother who at that time had come to occupy a very influential place among the Christians in Jerusalem.

"After they stopped speaking . . ." suggests that the report of Paul and Barnabas had received an overwhelming ovation, this referring to the end of the applause. It may also have been a little embarrassing to the apostle, under the circumstances, to have called him The Rock (Peter)! James, Cephas and John had probably met with Paul earlier, before the formal assembly, and formed a solid agreement on the course of the meeting.

J. R. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, p. 838 suggested that, "Before the conference a complete settlement was reached. The Twelve acknowledged Paul's teaching as orthodox, recognized him as the apostle to the Gentiles, conceded his demand that the Gentiles should be free from the observance of the Law, and gave him the right hand of fellowship. After this the result of the council was a foregone conclusion."

It is evident the Dummelow is correct in this, which means that the decisive part of the confrontation in Jerusalem took place before the formal gathering, that it was dominated and controlled, not by the Pharisee party in Jerusalem, but by the apostle Paul. James' great message here appealed to Scripture as an effective means of achieving the unity of all.

"Taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name . . ." Everett F. Harrison, *Wycliffe Commentary*, p. 438 said, "This was the usual Old Testament word designating Israel as the true people of God. The Gentiles were now included in this people. The "rebuilding of the tabernacle of David" must

therefore refer to the salvation of the Jewish remnant, “the Israel within Israel.” (Romans 9:8; 11:1-5)

All of the Old Testament promises to Israel are fulfilled in Christ and the church. Christians are the “seed of Abraham.” (Galatians 3:7, 29) He is a Jew who is one inwardly. (Romans 2:28-29)

“All the Gentiles who are called by My name . . .” The Scripture to which James appealed in this is a free rendition of Amos 9:11, his purpose being to show that the Gentiles were prophetically included in the people of God.

“Says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old.” All of the stirring events of that great day were known from of old by the Father and revealed unto men in the holy prophets.

Verses 19-20

“My judgment . . .” James here did not announce the findings of the council but his own judgment, also refraining from issuing any such thing as a command or an order regarding the promised restrictions, the latter resting upon the authority of the Holy Spirit (verse 28), not upon any legislative authority of the council.

Despite the fact of the Greek language having many verbs of commanding, F. J. A. Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*, p. 82 pointed out that none of them is used here, “The independence of the Ecclesia of Antioch had to be respected, and yet in such a way as not to encourage disregard either of the Mother Ecclesia, or of the Lord’s own apostles, or of the unity of the whole Christian body.”

The four prohibitions here are that the Christians should refrain from:

- (1) pollutions of idols,
- (2) fornication,
- (3) things strangled, and
- (4) blood.

The binding nature of these restrictions was pointed out by Orin Root, *Acts*, p. 117 saying, “Not only the apostles and elders and brethren, but also the Holy Spirit concurred in the message of verse 28, making this an inspired message, not merely a ruling of the church or its leaders.”

These prohibitions do not imply that other sins of dishonesty and immorality were permitted. Orin Root, *Ibid.* said, probably referring to sins, “Which were

so common among the Gentiles that they were not even recognized as wrong until Christian teaching denounced them.”

The principal barrier to social and religious unity among the Jewish and Gentile Christians was the low standard of behavior so common among the later. Idol feasts were shameful debaucheries, marked by the most vulgar and immoral behavior, the prohibitions against pollution of idols and fornication being almost, in fact, one prohibition. In fact, it is possible that all four of these restrictions relate to idol worship.

Clement, *Recognitions of (Ante-Nicene Fathers)*, Vol. VIII, p. 143 said, “The things which pollute both the soul and the body are these: to partake of the table of demons, that is, to taste things sacrificed, or blood, or a carcass which is strangled.”

Although from the Pseudo-Clementine writings, the above quotation states rather clearly that the eating of blood and things strangled was also connected with idolatrous feasts. In addition to that possible connection, however, the prohibition by God in the covenant with Noah, said, “Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.” (Genesis 9:4)

This makes it clear that the denial of blood as food to man antedates the Mosaic Law. Thus, they are wrong who see these restrictions as a symbolical binding of the Law on Christians. The authority they have for Christians of all ages derives neither from Moses’ law nor from the commandment of Noah, but from the authority of the Holy Spirit. (verse 28)

These very things were the principal barrier to fellowship in the primitive church; and this reason alone was more than sufficient for the prohibitions.

Verse 21

Many Jewish Christians were still attending the synagogues every Sabbath, hearing the law and the prophets being read; and, as they would continue to observe such restrictions, those given here were the minimal prohibitions consistent with any true fellowship between such diverse elements as the Jews and Gentiles contained within the fold of the pristine church. It is a marvel of wisdom, forbearance and understanding that such a formidable threat to unity could have been so gloriously resolved as was done here.

Verse 22

The wise precaution observed here was that of providing a dual witness with representatives of both sides, in order to forestall any recurrence of disunity.

Silas the same as Silvanus, may have been there for the first time. He was brought here by Paul, marking the beginning of a relationship that was to continue on the mission field. Silas would prove an invaluable ally for Paul; because, coming from Jerusalem, he would be able to verify the recognition of Paul's apostleship by the whole church.

Verses 23-26

The churches of south Galatia were included under Antioch, as having been established from that church. The words chosen for this communication were warm, sincere and complimentary, recognizing the marvelous, unselfish devotion of the missionaries who had preached to the Gentiles.

Verses 27-29

It is of interest that the Greek New Testament omits the preposition before the middle two of these four prohibitions, thus: The Nestle Greek Text With a Literal English Translation, p. 535 says, "Abstain from idol sacrifices and blood and things strangled and from fornication."

Verses 30-31

It was indeed an occasion worthy of great rejoicing and celebration. The Holy Spirit had prevailed over one of the most serious threats ever encountered by the apostolic church.

Verse 32

This verse gives additional information regarding Judas and Silas, namely, that they were also prophets.

Verses 33-35

The Revised Version omits verse 34 which reads: "It seemed good to Silas to remain there."

A NEW PARTNER FOR PAUL

Verse 36

Paul was very diligent to keep on teaching the taught in order to prevent discouragement and defection. It would appear that he had every intention of

making the excursion with Barnabas until Barnabas insisted on taking his nephew, John Mark.

Verse 37

It will be remembered that this was the young man who had defected from the first journey at Perga in Pamphylia. (13:13)

Verses 38-39

“A sharp disagreement . . .” Strong men with minds strongly made up often find disagreement between them; and the one redeeming note in this otherwise unhappy and regrettable episode is that neither party to the dispute permitted it to hinder the work of God. Rather there was a beneficial result in that there were now two teams of missionaries on the field in the place of only one.

“Sailed away to Cyprus . . .” It was but natural that Barnabas would prefer the journey to his native Cyprus. However, in the providence of God, no record has come down to us, the evangelist Luke following, not the labors of Barnabas, but those of Paul. However, it must be presumed that much good was also done by Barnabas and Mark.

THE SECOND MISSIONARY TOUR

Verses 40-41

Both Syria and Cilicia lay between Antioch (which was in Syria) and the south Galatian churches toward which Paul headed; but he worked diligently confirming churches in those provinces also.

CHAPTER 16

This chapter has the continuation of the second missionary tour, relating the revisiting of Lystra and Derbe (verses 1-5); the Macedonian call (verses 6-10); the conversion of Lydia and others in Philippi (verses 11-15); the healing of the demoniac girl (verses 16-18); beating and imprisonment of Paul and Silas (verses 19-24); earthquake and conversion of the jailer (verses 25-34); and the concluding of their efforts in Philippi, in which Paul and Silas receive the apology of the authorities, are released, and depart from Philippi after seeing the brethren (verses 35-40).

REVISITING LYSTRA AND DERBE

Verses 1-2

Paul's stoning at Lystra on the first tour was not an indication of failure, because out of that tragic experience glorious fruit of the gospel appeared. On his second return to Lystra, Paul was rewarded by the emergence of a young convert who was destined to be a faithful companion of the great apostle, and whose name would adorn two of the 27 New Testament books. These verses reveal the good reputation of Timothy, not only in his home community of Lystra, but also in the more important city of Iconium as well.

"Son of a Jewish woman . . ." Her name was Eunice, Timothy's grandmother (Eunice's mother) being Lois. (2 Timothy 1:5) Luke did not give the names, since he was primarily concerned with the racial problem relating to the circumcision of Timothy.

Despite the fact of Timothy's father being a Greek, Eunice had reared him in the Hebrew faith; and, in this circumstance, Paul decided to circumcise him.

Verse 3

"To go with him . . ." Paul, seeing in this promising young man the qualities which would commend him to the work of a missionary, decided to take him along on the journey.

"Circumcised him . . ." This was not for the purpose of enabling Timothy to become a Christian, for that he already was, having obeyed the gospel on the first tour. Neither was it for the purpose of admitting Timothy into any higher fellowship, or any more abundant grace—the reason for it being simply the one bluntly stated; "because of the Jews that were there."

For they all knew that his father was a Greek . . ." Knowing Timothy's father was a Greek, they would have assumed that Timothy had never been circumcised. Furthermore, they would have raised trouble for Paul over that issue wherever possible; and therefore, purely as a matter of expediency, Paul met it by the circumcision of Timothy.

Verse 4

The essential message of those decrees was that Gentiles were not to be burdened by circumcision and law keeping; and by providing copies of them for the young churches, Paul protected them against the devices of the Judaizers.

This position Paul had required the apostles and elders in Jerusalem to accept. Even the four prohibitions regarding idols, fornication, blood and things strangled were grounded not in the law of Moses primarily, but in God's teachings which antedated the Mosaic covenant. (Genesis 9:3-5)

Verse 5

Having been freed, for the time being, from the troublesome insistence of the Judaizers, the churches prospered spiritually and numerically. The issue, however, was not dead; the Pharisee-Christians would trouble the whole world of that day by their efforts to subvert Christianity by mixing elements of Judaism with it; and the issue would not be effectively removed until the armies of Vespasian and Titus removed the Jewish state, the daily sacrifices, and the temple itself in 70 A. D.

The books of Hebrews and Romans were addressed, in part, to this very issue; and Galatians, written about this time (50 A. D.) is full of it.

How strange it is that the Judaizers have never disappeared. Even now, nearly two millennia afterward, the Judaizers are still in business:

- (1) attempting to bind Sabbath-observance on Christians,
- (2) dragging instruments of music into the worship (even though David himself was condemned for that),
- (3) devising daily "sacrifices," such as that of the Mass,
- (4) the lighting of sacred candles,
- (5) the requirement of certain periods of official, formal fasts, and
- (6) the imposition of diet restrictions, etc.

THE MACEDONIAN CALL

Verse 6

"Phrygian and Galatia . . ." The exact boundaries of these cannot certainly be known, due to the dual usage of the term "Galatia," the view preferred here being that the churches of south Galatia (the larger Roman province) which Paul had founded on the first tour were again visited in this.

"Forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia . . ." The word "Asia" here does not refer to the continent, but to the Roman province of that name which lay west of the cities evangelized in South Galatia on the first tour. In it were the great city of Ephesus, and also the other cities mentioned in

Revelation: Sardis, Smyrna, Philadelphia, Laodicea, Pergamum, and Thyatira. It was only natural that Paul should have planned to evangelize those places, but the Holy Spirit forbade him.

How did this prohibition come to Paul? Was it some subjective impression borne inward upon his soul by God's Spirit, or did it come in the direct words of some recognized prophet in the early church? In the light of Luke's own explanation in 20:23 and 21:10, the latter possibility seems the correct one.

Verses 7-8

"Mysia . . ." was at the northern border between Asia and Bithynia; but when Paul would have passed through Asia into Bithynia, he was again forbidden by the Spirit of Jesus.

"Spirit of Jesus . . ." The Spirit of Jesus is here recognized exactly the same as the Spirit of God, indicating forcefully that the full deity and godhead of Jesus Christ was fully accepted and received by the Christians at that mid-point of the first century. E. H. Plumptre, Elliott's Commentary on the Whole Bible, p. 104 stresses the dogmatic importance of this verse as, "Confirming the doctrine that the Holy Spirit stands in the same relationship to the Son as to the Father, and may therefore be spoken of either as the Spirit of God or of Christ (Romans 8:9), or of Jesus."

Verses 9-10

"A vision . . ." Here is an instance in which God evidently spoke to Paul subjectively, by means of a vision; but the element of uncertainty persists in the fact that they "concluded" that God's message was in the vision, making the decision to rest, in part, upon their deduction, and not as being based on a firm command of the Father.

Regarding the prohibitions which had been placed in Paul's way, forbidding his preaching in Asia and then in Bithynia, and the natural deduction from themselves that they should not return to lands already evangelized, and all this coupled with the instance of Paul's vision; it is not a miss to discover in the providential guidance thus given Paul a substantial amount of deliberate guidance and common sense; nor does this deny the fact that God actually guided them; it is the manner of His doing so which is apparent here.

“Straightway we sought to go into Macedonia . . . “ Here surfaces the first of the famous “we” passages of Acts which indicates that at Troas, Luke became a member of Paul’s company.

H. Leo Boles, *A Commentary on Acts of Apostles*, p. 255 understood this passage as teaching that Luke was already a preacher of the gospel to the Gentiles, basing it on the following statement in verse 10, “Concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel unto them . . .” Boles said, by the use of “us,” Luke showed that he included himself with Paul, Silas, and Timothy as preachers of the gospel.”

Verses 11-12

No mention is made of Paul’s preaching in Troas at this time; yet, a bit later, there is revealed to have been a church there. (20:5) Was that church the result of Luke’s preaching? Given the implied fact of Luke’s being a preacher of the gospel and the usual reticence of the sacred writers to speak of themselves, it may be supposed that he founded the Troas church, but this is not certain.

“Straight course to Samothrace . . .” This journey in a single day was possible because of a favoring wind.

“Neapolis” means “New city;” and they continued there from Samothrace, as Neapolis afforded a more favorable route to Philippi.

“Philippi . . . the first of the district . . . a Roman colony . . .” Some have concluded that by “first of the district” Luke meant the most important town in the district, others supposing that it means merely that this was the first city they came to in their journey inland.

PHILIPPI

From the standpoint of Christianity, this is not merely the first of the district, but the first of Europe, for it was here that the gospel message was planted by means of the conversions related in this chapter. The congregation which developed there was very dear to Paul, and to them he addressed the book of Philippians.

Historically, it was founded by Philip of Macedon and controlled the gold mines of Pangaeus, thus providing the financial muscle to propel the armies of Alexander the Great to world conquest. The Romans possessed the city

following the battle of Pydna, 168 B. C.; and it was here that Brutus and Cassius were defeated by Antony and Octavian in 42 B.C.

Philippi was made a Roman colony with many privileges, notably that of citizenship, and was provided with military roads and fortifications.

Verse 13

“On the Sabbath day . . .” There was no synagogue in Philippi, but whatever Jews might have been in the area could have been expected to observe prayers on the Sabbath, and the preachers “supposed” such a place of prayer to be a certain site on the river’s edge. If Luke had been a citizen of Philippi, as many have believed, it is rather strange that he would not have known certainly of this place of prayer.

F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, p. 330 commented that, “From this time Luke apparently spent some years in Philippi.” H. Leo Boles said, “The fact of there being no synagogue means that there were fewer than ten Jewish men living in Philippi that being the number required before a synagogue could be built.” In the absence of a synagogue, the Jews often provided places of prayer by the rivers, or other suitable locations, the custom of going to the rivers for these sites dating from the Babylonian captivity. (Psalms 137:1; Ezra 8:15, 21)

Verse 14

“Lydia . . . a seller of purple fabrics . . .” An expensive purple dye, made of the murex shell, was one of the most valuable commodities of antiquity; and Lydia’s engaging in trade of such a product surely indicates some considerable capital. This was the dye that gave rise to the words “royal purple,” suggested by the fact that royalty and the extremely rich were the principal purchasers of it.

“Of Thyatira . . .” Paul had been forbidden to preach in the province of Asia, in which Thyatira was located, it was nevertheless a citizen of Thyatira who became the first European convert.

“A worshiper of God . . .” These words emphasize the deeply religious character of Lydia.

“The Lord opened her heart to respond . . .” The obvious means by which God opened the heart of Lydia was that of preaching the gospel to her. Since God gave the gospel, the results produced by it were properly said to be God’s action.

Verse 15

“When she had been baptized . . .” Don De Welt, *Acts Made Actual*, p. 219 observed, “The New testament conversions all end with the baptism of the convert. Not with their prayer experience but with their baptism; not with their testimony, but with their baptism.”

“And her household . . .” The allegation that this household included infants is denied by the earlier statements that the evangelists “spoke” to the women that were come together” (verse 13), thus making it mandatory to find Lydia’s household in the group of women. The household baptisms of the New Testament afford no support whatever for the notion that, infants should be baptized.

“She prevailed upon us . . .” The manner in which she put the invitation, coupled with her insistence upon it, constrained them. They would not long remain, however, for events would shortly occur which would thrust Paul forward on his journey.

Verses 16-18

“As we were going to the place of prayer . . .” Evidently, Paul and company made daily visits to the place of prayer. This caught the attention of the demoniac girl; and, for some time, she made a habit of following them and crying out an endorsement of their message.

“Spirit of divination . . .” The Greek here has “A Python spirit,” thus Luke identified this unfortunate girl as one coming from the pagan temple at Delphi, where the Pythian Apollo was worshiped, the python being sacred to him, and his devotees being said to have the python spirit. Paul’s addressing the “spirit” in her clearly indicates exactly the same kind of demon possession so often healed by our Lord.

“Bond-servants of the Most High God . . .” The Gerasene demoniacs used this same expression regarding Jesus (Mark 5:7), this speech of the girl thus proving the fact of her being possessed by a demon.

“Paul was greatly annoyed . . .” The slave masters who were exploiting this alleged soothsayer were making a lot of money out of her. They knew she as a fraud, else they would have believed it when she identified Luke and Paul and company as servants of the Most High God showing the right way of salvation.

Paul therefore knew that if he cast the demon out of her, there would be a sharp conflict with the evil men who owned her. He delayed acting as long as he properly could, hoping perhaps that she would desist; but when she continued, Paul cast the demon out. He, even as the Lord, could not afford an endorsement of one so clearly evil; and furthermore, any sign or miracle that Paul might have performed would have been seized upon by the masters of the girl in an effort to exploit such to their own benefit.

Verse 19

J. W. McGarvey, Commentary on Acts, II, p. 98 pointed out a somewhat humorous pun in Luke's Greek at this place. He said, "That when the evil spirit went out, the masters saw that the hope of their gain went out." The retaliation Paul had evidently feared took place at once.

Verses 20-21

Thus action was founded on racial hatred, supported by falsehood, and aggravated by physical violence on the part of the accusers.

"These men . . . being Jews . . ." This was the principal basis of the attack on Paul and Silas, Luke and Timothy apparently being allowed to pass unmolested, because being Greeks (Timothy was half Greek), they would not have had the typical Jewish appearance of Paul and Silas. There was nothing honest or forthright about this brutal movement, against Paul and Silas, being simply an exercise in spite, brought on by the spoilation of their evil use of the demon-possessed girl. There was no formal trial of any kind and no opportunity for the accused to defend themselves; it was a case of "mob justice" in which the population willingly participated.

Verses 22-24

Under the system of Roman administration throughout the ancient empire, the police attendants of public officials carried bundles of rods, or cane, bound in a circle around an axe, symbolizing the power of the authorities to chastise and to execute, a representation of this ancient device being visible today on the reverse side of the U. S. dime.

"To be beaten with rods . . ." The actual beating was inflicted upon the bare flesh, no form of punishment being any more savage and brutal. Three times Paul was thus compelled to suffer for Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:25)

“Threw them into the inner prison . . . fastened their feet in the stocks . . . “ The jailer, instead of “keeping them safely” as charged, added the element of torture to their imprisonment by putting them in stocks. This prevented there being able either to sit up or to lie down, and must have been a most painful and unnecessary humiliation imposed upon them by the pagan jailer. God would speak to him, however, before the night was over.

Verse 25

This is one of the most thrilling things ever recorded of the apostolic missionaries and has inspired many a sermon and printed article on “Songs at Midnight.” The bleeding, suffering apostles uttering their prayers and singing the praises of God under circumstances such as they were in was something which must indeed have amazed and enthralled the other prisoners.

It was midnight, not merely in that jail, but throughout the great pagan empire also, a midnight of morals, humanity, and justice, as well as that of night; but within the inner dungeon there were songs of praise to the true God and suffering saints who offered themselves to the Father in prayer. In a wider sense, the prayers and songs raised at Philippi would at last permeate the pagan empire itself and erect the cathedrals of the historical church upon the ruins of the Roman autocracy. Paul and Silas had the grace to forgive, before they were asked, to and to trust where they could not see.

Verse 26

“A great earthquake . . .” The conduct of the mistreated apostles in that jail was such that, when the earthquake came (from whatever cause), every listener who had heard them praying and singing would at once have concluded that God had thus answered their petitions; and we do not hesitate to draw the same conclusion.

The circumstance of every door being opened all stocks being released encourages the deduction that God here acted upon behalf of His servants.

Verse 27

Pagan that he was, the jailer lived by a harsh code and was willing to die by it. J. S. Howson, *Life and Epistles of Saint Paul*, p. 237 said that, “Cassius, unable to survive defeat, covered his face in the empty tent, and ordered his freedman to strike the blow.” Here his messenger Titinius held it to be a Roman’s part to

follow his master as a suicide; and J. S. Howson, *Ibid*, wrote, “Brutus bade adieu to his friends and ended the last struggle for the republic by self-inflicted death.”

Not many suicides are mentioned in the Bible. In pagan lands, however, suicide was an accepted manner of solving a problem, as in the case before us.

Verse 28

The fact of none of the prisoners having fled is itself remarkable, showing that they responded to Paul’s evident insistence that none should seek to escape, which would appear from Paul’s ability in this matter to speak for all of them. There having been no light in the dungeon, some have wondered how Paul saw the jailer; but Everett F. Harrison, *Wycliffe Commentary*, p. 444 observed that, “Paul from the inner prison could see the outline of the jailer in the doorway.”

Verses 29-31

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” This question occurs at three places in Acts, identically in each instance as to meaning, and varying only slightly in form:

- (1) “What shall we do?” (2:37)
- (2) “What must I do to be saved?” (16:30), and
- (3) “Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (22:16)

Why this diversity in the answers? Salvation, as proclaimed in the New Testament, requires, absolutely, that sinners should:

- (1) Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- (2) Repent of their sins and transgressions.
- (3) Be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

The advocates of “faith only” as God’s plan of redemption for alien sinners take their stand upon the flimsiest of foundations when they attempt to make Paul’s instructions to this jailer as to what he should do first a statement of all that he was commanded to do. The narrative itself effectively refutes the “faith only” theorists.

Verse 32

“Spoke the word of the Lord . . .” A great deal of teaching was most certainly included in the midnight instructions which the apostolic preacher provided,

much of which we may only guess about, with reference to content: but one thing is certain, “the word of the Lord” which they addressed to him included the commandment that he should be baptized into Christ. The fact that men deny this is not any more amazing than Satan’s denial of God’s word to Eve, when the evil one said, “You shall not surely die.”

Verse 33

This is another so-called “household” baptism; but no infants are mentioned; and the fact of Paul and Silas having spoken unto them the word of the Lord (verse 32) proves that no infants are in view here.

The jailer did not merely “believe” in the Lord; he repented of his sins, as indicated by the washing of stripes he himself might have inflicted. That he was baptized is clearly stated, not as something which he eventually did, but as being done “immediately,” the same hour of the night.

If there was any device by which the Holy Spirit might have revealed to men any more certainly that baptism was a requirement of this jailer to be met before he could be saved, this writer cannot imagine what it might have been.

Verse 34

“Having believed in God . . .” is used as a synecdoche here for the whole bundle of things by which he had become a follower of Christ.

“Rejoiced greatly . . .” The rejoicing followed his baptism. Don De Welt was quoted earlier, “The conversions in the New Testament end, not with the testimony of the converts, but with their baptism.” Scriptural conversion does not exist apart from it.

Verse 35

There could have been some second thoughts on their part about the illegal proceedings of the day before; and by such a release of the prisoners they probably hoped to forestall any repercussions.

Verse 36

“Go in peace . . .” This seems to imply that one of the conditions of their release was that the preachers should leave town; but if that was their intention, the magistrates were in for a shock.

Verse 37

“Paul said to them . . .” Not the jailer only, but the sergeants also, were addressed.

“Men who are Romans . . .” This indicates that Silas was a Roman citizen, that possibly being one of the reasons Paul had for choosing him for the journey.

“Let them come themselves and bring us out . . .” The crime committed by the magistrates in beating and imprisoning Roman citizens without due process of law was a serious one. The simple statement, “I am a Roman citizen,” took all proceedings against a prisoner out of the hands of local authorities.

If it be wondered why Paul and Silas did not make such declarations the day before as they were being punished, the answer is that they did. A. C. Hervey, Pulpit Commentary, Vol. 18, ii, p. 32 said, “The magistrates probably refused to listen.” It was probably their remembrance of such protests that led to their reversal of judgment so early the next day.

Paul’s refusal to leave the jail, however, except on condition of being personally escorted out of it by the magistrates was a master stroke. It did much to establish the legality of their deeds in the popular mind and doubtless a source of infinite encouragement to the brethren.

The effect that they should get out of town was also negated. Despite the fact of Paul’s probable intention of soon leaving Philippi, he avoided any appearance of being thrown out of the city.

Verses 38-39

“They were afraid . . .” This was natural, because there were instances of very high Roman officials losing their positions and suffering drastic penalties for violating the traditional laws regarding citizens.

“They brought them out . . .” This was humiliating to the magistrates; and their consenting to do it is a measure of their concern over violations they had committed.

“Kept begging them to leave . . .” The words show that the apostles were not ordered, but requested, to leave the city, a request Paul and company honored, after due deliberation, and without doing so hastily.

Verse 40

Perhaps it was already time for Paul to leave. The hatred incurred by the healing of the demoniac, the unwillingness of the magistrates for them to remain there, and the fact that staunch converts to the faith had already been won; and, over and beyond all this, the call of many cities and villages here the gospel had never been heard—all these things would have inclined Paul to honor the request of the magistrates and depart. He did not leave however, without returning again to the hospitable home of Lydia, where, probably, the brethren gathered to be comforted and to express their fond farewells.

“They encouraged them . . .” means that the apostles, especially Paul and Silas, comforted the brethren! There is something astounding about this. Those men who had been so shamefully treated, abused, beaten, illegally cast into prison, suffering the torture of stocks in the inner dungeon—those men comforted the brethren! How noble, unselfish, and beautiful is that scene in which men whose backs were still raw and bloody from the scourge are cast in the role of comforters for young Christians whose distress at such events, while real enough, was nevertheless mental rather than physical.

CHAPTER 17

The continuation of the second missionary tour is the theme of chapter 17, in which Luke relates the success of Paul’s mission in Thessalonica (verse 1-9), even greater success in Beroea (verse 10-15), Paul’s arrival in Athens, where he was invited to speak in the Areopogas (verse 16-22), and the account of Paul’s address on Mars Hill (verses 23-34).

Verse 1

The passing by of certain towns to visit others gives a clue to the plan Paul was following. Everett F. Harrison, *Wycliffe Commentary*, p. 445 said it was that of “planting the gospel in strategic cities . . . he did not aim to preach wherever he could find an audience . . . but had a program for establishing churches in key centers.”

J. R. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, p. 841 observed that, “His plan was first to evangelize the seats of government and the trade centers,

knowing that if Christianity was once established in these places it would spread throughout the empire.”

”When they had traveled . . .” The use of the third person pronoun “they” in this verse is significant. John Wesley, *New Testament Commentary*, in loco, said, “Luke seems to have been left at Philippi.” Apparently, Luke continued there, preaching throughout that area until Paul returned (20:5-6), upon which occasion Luke again referred to himself as in Paul’s company, continuing to do so till the end of Acts.

It was also concluded by J. W. McGarvey, *Commentary on Acts*, ii, p. 100, “That due to the grammatical antecedent of “they” being “Paul and Silas,” “it is implied that Timothy also remained with Luke, to still further instruct and organize the church.”

THESSALONICA

At least as far back as the fourth century B. C., there was a city called Therma (named after hot springs in the area) “situated at the junction of the main land route from Italy to the East with the main route from the Aegean to the Danube.” (*The New Bible Dictionary*, p. 1272)

Cassander, the son of Antipater who governed Macedonia while Alexander the Great was campaigning in the East, was the man “who founded and embellished Therme, and called it after his wife, Thessalonica, Alexander’s sister.” (E. M. Blaiklock, *Cities of the New Testament*, p. 46 said, “It became the capital of Greek Macedonia.”

“Synagogue of the Jews . . .” As always Paul first the beloved chosen people, turning away from them only when compelled to do so by their rejection.

Verse 2

“Three Sabbath days . . .” does not indicate the length of Paul’s stay in Thessalonica, but the period of preaching primarily to Jews in the synagogue. E. H. Trenchard, *A New Testament Commentary*, p. 321 said, “This was followed by an indefinite period of preaching in the house of Jason, his host.”

Verse 3

That Jesus of Nazareth was the long-awaited Messiah promised in the Old Testament is the fundamental Christian faith, attested by some 333 Old

Testament prophecies fulfilled in Him. This appeal to the Old Testament is still the best beginning for teaching people who believe the Bible.

Verse 4

“Some were persuaded . . .” By the very nature of the gospel, some believe it, others do not; but the difference lies in the hearts of the hearers. The gospel is a message of life to some, death to others. (2 Corinthians 2:16)

“The God-fearing Greeks . . .” J. R. Dummelow, op. cit., p. 841 said, “Not necessarily proselytes, but persons who had given up idolatry, attended synagogue services and worshiped God.”

Verse 5

Such jealousy is easily understood. The devout Jews has been teaching in that city for generations with minimal results; then Paul and Silas in the space of three weeks or a little longer had moved a “great multitude” to accept the gospel. The unbelieving element in the synagogue retaliated by organizing a mob and assaulting the house of Jason, where Paul was living, hoping no doubt to find him there; which, if they had succeeded, might have resulted in Paul’s death.

“The house of Jason . . .” There is no reason why this Jason might not be the same person mentioned as one of Paul’s “kinsmen.” (Romans 16:21)

Verse 6

“Before the city authorities . . .” The Greek word here is “politarchs,” which is not found anywhere in classical Greek literature.

“These men who have upset the world . . .” The apostles were not “revolutionaries” in the modern sense of that word; but their teachings did entail a reversal of pagan value-judgments.

Verse 7

“The decrees of Caesar . . .” Jack P. Lewis, Historical Backgrounds of Bible History, p. 144 said, “In all probability, Claudius was the emperor referred to.” Since that ruler was an avowed enemy of the Jews (18:2), these Jews were guilty of the same mistake as those who crucified Christ, saying, “We have no king but Caesar.” (John 19:15)

This verse is important as showing that Paul believed in the present kingdom of Christ over which Jesus was then and still is ruling.

“Another king . . .” At that time, treason was interpreted in a wide sense and was severely punished. Of course, the Jews perverted Paul’s meaning, ignoring completely the spiritual nature of the kingdom Paul preached as being then in existence and ruled over by Jesus.

This situation reveals two key facts which explain Paul’s subsequent shift of emphasis from “King Jesus” to “Lord Jesus” in his preaching to the Gentiles.

These were:

- (1) emphasis of the kingship of Jesus could be easily perverted by the Jews into a charge of treason, and
- (2) at that particular point in history, the Gentile representatives of Caesar were unusually sensitive to such charges.

Everett F. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 446 perceived the above truth, and said, This incident illustrates why the epistles of Paul as well as Acts have relatively little to say about the kingdom of God. It was because these ideas (of the kingdom), familiar and precious (to believing Jews) were subject to misunderstanding by Romans.”

Verses 8-9

The seriousness of the charges against the apostles was such that the politarchs dared not ignore it; but the evidence presented to sustain them was so scanty that the official action was minimal.

“A pledge from Jason and the others . . .” They were probably compelled to put up large sums of money, perhaps their homes and businesses. As a guarantee of no further disturbances, meant that Paul could not remain in the city.

F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, p. 345 said, “This probably meant that Paul had to leave the city and that his friends guaranteed that he would not come back—at least during the present magistrate's term of office. It is probably to this situation that Paul referred in 1 Thessalonians 2:18, that he greatly desired to go back, but “Satan hindered us.”

It was indeed one of Satan’s victories. Paul could have gone back, of course; but it would have resulted in the loss of the Christians' property. Paul had not consented to such an arrangement, the details having been arranged by his friends on his behalf in his absence! It was a neat little victory for the devil.

Verse 10

“Sent Paul and Silas away . . .” This journey to Beroea was some “Sixty miles,” and the urgency of their departure is seen in their leaving at night. They no longer traveled the main road, the Via Egnatia, but took a less-traveled route to a somewhat out-of-the-way place called Beroea.

BEROEA

This city is “the modern Verria” and was probably founded in the fifth century B. C. In Paul’s day, it was a prosperous center with a significant center with a significant Jewish population and a synagogue. It was the home of Sopater. (Acts 20:4) Here Paul followed his usual manner of beginning work in the synagogue, but this time with significantly greater than usual success.

Verse 11

The Beroeans were “more noble” than others. In what way? Alexander Campbell, *Acts of Apostles*, p. 117 said, “They were more noble minded, not in the fictitious nobility of earth, but in their generous sympathies of piety and humanity with the divine will.”

One of the epic principles in evidence here is that even the word of an apostle is properly studied and verified in the light of the Bible, the same being not the word of men, but of God. Any teaching, even that of a genuine apostle to say nothing of alleged “successors,” that fails to harmonize with the Bible is to be rejected.

Verse 12

Here, as at Thessalonica, there was a widespread acceptance of the truth by many of the leading members of the community.

“Believed . . .” means that they accepted Christianity, believing in Christ, repenting of sins, and being baptized into Christ.

Verse 13

The fundamental antipathy between darkness and light, the implacable hatred of Satan for the truth, was there evidenced by those relentless foes of the gospel, who at such trouble and expense of themselves exploited every opportunity to slander and oppose Paul’s preaching of the gospel. W. R. Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 43 said, “The hounds of persecution bayed on Paul’s trail

from Thessalonica to Beroea.” They tracked him from city to city; and, as Paul thought upon this, he must have remembered his own days as a persecutor.

Verses 14-15

The words “as to the sea” seem to indicate that this was a feint to foil pursuing enemies; and the fact of Paul’s being “conducted and brought” as far as Athens, suggests an overland journey.

The brethren went to considerable expense; and the fact of a sea-voyage requiring only three days to Athens, contrasted with about a month overland, forces the conclusion that they would have gone by sea, if possible.

The somewhat different strategy employed by Paul at Thessalonica and Beroea in his not waiting till physical violence forced his departure, but moving forward as soon as it was threatened, probably developed from fear that he would be killed by his bitter enemies; and certainly it was protection against the very thing which prompted the brethren to accompany Paul wherever he went. J. W. McGarvey, *op. cit.*, p. 116 also agreed with the view that the exact destination of Paul and the means of his reaching it had not been fully formulated when they left Beroea, and that: “The decision that he should sail to Athens made it necessary for him to send back word to Silas and Timothy.”

J. R. Dummelow, *op. cit.*, p. 841 traced the movements of Silas and Timothy thus, “As per instructions, they joined Paul in Athens; but, filled with anxiety for the churches, he promptly sent them back, Timothy to Thessalonica and Silas to Philippi.” When they returned to Athens, they found Paul had gone on to Corinth, where they rejoined him.” (18:5)

Verse 16

How differently the great apostle viewed Athens, when contrasted with the attitude of the ordinary tourist who should have been enraptured by the magnificent architecture and artistic glory of the city. This great citadel of Gentile intellectualism was, in Paul’s view, a pile of idols; and his holy heart was filled with indignation.

However, John Peter Lange, *op. cit.*, p. 328 said, “On this account, Paul did not seize an axe and destroy the images of the gods, and the altars, like iconoclastic Puritans.” Paul was not concerned with removing the idolatrous art from the city, but with removing the worship of idols from men’s hearts.

Here in the great pagan metropolitan Athens, Paul found a disgusting confirmation of what he already knew, namely, that “The world through its wisdom did not come to know God.” (1 Corinthians 1:21)

Verse 17

F. B. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 349 said, “Paul was not the kind of man who could take a complete holiday from the main business of his life.” While he waited for the return of Silas and Timothy, he preached the gospel, just as he did always, “to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”

Verse 18

“Epicurean and Stoic philosophers . . .” In Athens there were:

- (1) The Academy of Plato,
- (2) the Lyceum of Aristotle,
- (3) the porch of Zeno, and
- (4) the garden of Epicurus.

Followers of Zeno, called Stoics, took their name from “Stoa,” the Greek name of the painted porch where he taught. The Stoics believed that the good life was obtained through resignation and the pursuit of what they thought was virtue, glorifying human reason and self-sufficiency.

The Epicureans made pleasure the end and all of human existence.

Both philosophies, however, were outcroppings of a single basic error, that of the deification of humanity, an error that blinds the present generation no less than theirs.

Sir William M. Ramsey, *op. cit.*, p. 105 noted, “Practically, both philosophies made man and not God the ruler of life; and this denial of Divine government issued in making the city of philosophers also the city where idols were most numerous. Those who made light of God were willing to accept and recognize any number of gods.”

Naturally, Paul’s preaching of Jesus Christ and the resurrection would have challenged and denied such philosophies.

Verse 19

“They took him . . .” implies a friendly compulsion, not an arrest. There was, as yet, no appreciation for any truth Paul might declare; their judgment on that having already been uttered in verse 18, where they referred to him as an idle

babbler, the word actually meaning “seed picker.” It had the meaning, as applied to Paul, of one who picks up bits and scraps of information and passes them off before others as learning. The true purpose in bringing Paul to the Areopagus was that of curiosity seekers.

Verses 20-21

“The Areopagus . . .” E. H. Plumptre, *op. cit.*, p. 114 said, “May stand either for the Hill of Mars, simply as a locality, or for the Court which sat there, the oldest and most revered tribunal in Athens.” It is likely that some of the members of the Court were there, perhaps many of them, when Paul spoke.

Orrin Root, *op. cit.*, p. 136 noted that, “Mars Hill . . .” was named after the mythical god of war who was tried here for murdering the son of Poseidon (Neptune) the sea-god, in one of the many squabbles of the gods.”

Strange that the Prince of Peace should have been proclaimed on that ancient hill of the war god.

“Nothing other than telling or hearing something new . . .” This grave fault of the Athenian populace in regarding things simply for their novelty was denounced by their own greatest orator. A. C. Hervey, *op. cit.*, p. 61 said, “In his first Philippic, Demosthenes said that when they should have been up and doing, they went around asking, is there any news?”

PAUL’S SPEECH ON MARS HILL

Verse 22

“Very religious . . .” has an alternate meaning of “very superstitious.” Paul’s purpose at the outset was one of rapport with his hearers.

Verse 23

Polytheism is here manifested in one of its most pitiful characteristics. Some poor worshiper, having placated all the gods that he knew, still felt no certainty or confidence, but went out and erected an altar to the god who was unknown. The proliferation of idols in Athens, coupled with the amazing example of it here prompted Alexander Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 119 to write, “They had gone beyond their contemporaries in erecting an altar to “the unknown God.” . . . No other people or city had thus confessed their ignorance and their devotion. It was a grand conception to erect an altar to the GREAT UNKNOWN in the center of Greek civilization.”

Sir William M. Ramsay, *op. cit.*, p. 197 wrote, “Paul treats the worship of deities by pagans as a misdirected form of a natural and correct religious impulse.”

Verse 24

In this Paul proclaimed the unity and creative power of the one eternal and true God, hailing Him as the Creator of all things and the Lord of heaven and earth alike. There was absolutely nothing of this concept in the Greek philosophies.

“Does not dwell in temples made with hands . . . “ Paul who had learned from Stephen’s dying words that God’s true temple was not a physical house at all but a living community of believers in Christ (7:48) first applied the words to the ornate temple of the Jews, a far greater temple than any in Athens; but here he applied the principle to the idol temples of Athens; they, even more than the temple to the Jews, failed of being suitable as a residence of God.

Verse 25

Here God is proclaimed, not only as Creator of all things, but as also the sustainer of all things. Those frivolous Athenians, intent on hearing some tantalizing new thought, were here treated to one of the most profound addresses ever uttered on earth, and one which most of them were extremely unworthy of hearing.

Verse 26

John Wesley, *op. cit.*, in loco, along with others have supposed that Paul here referred merely to seasons of climate to such natural boundaries as “mountains, seas, rivers, and the like;” but we believe much more is intended, namely, that there is a providence with regard to races and nations of men. Certainly there was a providence in the ascendancy of Israel in the long pre-Christian ages; and there still is, the continuity of the secular majority who rejected Christ until “the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.”

“Made from one every nation of mankind . . .” No matter how one reads it, whether “one race,” “one blood,” or “one family,” the meaning is the same: all men are descended from a single ancestor. “Eve was the mother of all living” (Genesis 3:20); and the proof of this is evidenced by many things, one of these

being the ability of a man of any race to provide a blood transfusion for a man of any other race. The oneness of all men is the unity in view here.

Paul thus challenged the snobbishness of every major division of ancient civilization. The Jews classified all men as Jews and Gentiles; the Romans classified them citizens and non-citizens; and the Greeks viewed the whole world as either Greeks or barbarians. All of these classifications were the same, meaning “US and everyone else”

Verse 27

“That they should seek God . . .” The purpose of God’s exalting some races or nations for a season, and then debasing them and raising up others, is revealed as a device for bringing them to faith in God. Repeatedly throughout history, nations in the ascendancy forget God and turned their backs upon His word; whereupon God cast them down and raised up others. We may only pray that America heeds this fact before it is too late.

“He is not far from each one of us . . . “ E. H. Plumptre, *op. cit.*, p. 118 noted, “In this Paul taught the truth which the apostle John afterward proclaimed, that Christ is the “true Light that lights every man coming into the world.”

Verse 28

The nearness of God to all, the fact of every man’s being “in Him” as the basis even of physical life, and the truth that men are God’s offspring (in the spiritual sense)—all these things reveal conclusively that the earliest Christian conception of God was that of His being invisible, eternal, spiritual, omnipotent, and omnipresent.

“Some of your own poets have said . . .” Alexander Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 120 said, “These words are the first words of a hexameter found in Aratus , a Cecilian poet, whose poem antedates Christ some 270 years.

Verse 29

This struck squarely at the idols of Athens, making the whole proposition that an idol, in any sense whatever, could by an degree, even the least, represent deity or even suggest it, much less “remind one” of the Lord, a fallacy.

Henry Sloan Coffin, *The Ten Commandments*, p. 39 said, “The spirit of Christianity and the spirit of figurative art are opposed, because art cannot free itself from sensuous associations.”

How could any form of art, itself created by one, who himself, is but a creature, in any way suggest or represent the Creator? How can that which is static, dead, immobile, perishable and decaying be any proper reminder of the true and living God?

Verse 30

This would be a marvelous opportunity for Paul to expound salvation “by faith only” if he had ever believed or taught such a thing; but here he used “repent” in exactly the same manner as he often used “believe” that is, as a synecdoche for all of the things required of the alien sinner, namely, faith, repentance, and baptism.

“Having overlooked the times of ignorance God . . .” This is very like the teaching Paul gave before the pagans of Lystra (14:16-18), showing that the sophisticates in Athens were upon the same footing before God as the ignorant pagans of the outer provinces.

Verse 31

“Fixed a day . . .” This refers to the final judgment of all men, sometimes called the “Great White Throne Judgment,” but, in any case, the one and only judgment day mentioned in the New Testament. This is not the day of death, for “after this” comes the judgment. (Hebrews 9:27) Christ will preside over the Great Judgment, rewarding all men according to the deeds done in the body. The fact of the judgment’s being scheduled for a day already “appointed” suggests that God has a timetable for the accomplishment of all things intended by His providing salvation for men. If this is the case, it will occur on time, exactly as scheduled; and the fullness of all God intended will be accomplished within the framework of time allowed for it.

“Having furnished proof to all men . . .” In this is one of the great purposes of Christ’s death and resurrection. That God thus honored the Christ is intended as a means of assuring every man that God has the power to order and conduct just such a thing as the final judgment.

Verses 32-33

Paul’s fearless proclamation of God’s absolute demand of universal repentance on the part of men, plus the reference to a final judgment in which the righteous shall be rewarded and the wicked punished, plus the additional fact that Jesus

Christ will be the final judge of all who ever lived—these are considerations which must evoke awe, apprehension, and even terror when fully understood and contemplated by sinful men. There is therefore in such preaching a move to awaken fear in the hearts of sinners.

J. W. McGarvey, *op. cit.*, p. 129 said, “The wicked man must be made afraid to continue in sin, before the goodness of God can lead him to repentance; and the preacher of the gospel who neglects to employ the thunders of this heavenly artillery not only fails to preach according to the Divine model, but he will preach a feeble gospel that can never work deep-seated repentance.” Some of the Athenians mocked at the truth; but Paul never altered a word of it. He walked out of their presence.

E. H. Trenchard, *op. cit.*, p. 323 said, “The mockers would reap what they sowed; the procrastinators never heard Paul again, as far as we know; but the vital nucleus of believers would continue to preach the Divine wisdom in the center of Greek civilization.”

F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p.364 commented that, “Paul made a few converts in Athens; and we are not told that he planted a church there.” However, Bruce himself admitted that Luke’s account of Paul’s speech at Athens is “a greatly shortened summary of his actual speech,” (*Ibid*, p. 362) and that’s being true suggests also that his account of the results is a token report of far more conversions than are given.

Verse 34

Don De Welt, *op. cit.*, p. 243 reminded us that, “History says that the church in Athens was one of the strongest congregations in the empire in the second and third centuries.” John Peter Lange, *op. cit.*, p. 331 also pointed out that, “A Christian congregation in Athens flourished in an eminent degree.”

“Dionysius the Areopagite . . .” This man, according to J. R. Dummelow *op. cit.*, p. 843, “Was a member of the court of the Areopagus. As all members of the Areopagus had passed through the office of Archon, Dionysius must have been of high social position.”

“Damaris . . .” Her background is not given. There is no intimation that she was connected with the Areopagus in any matter; and the speculation of F. F.

Bruce, op, cit., p. 364 that she might “Have been a God-fearer who heard him in the synagogue” is not at all unlikely.

Among those converted, it is also probable that Stephanas was one of them. (1 Corinthians 16:15) Although he and his house were evidently residents of Corinth, the naming of them as first fruits of Achaia would seem to indicate the fact of their being converted at Athens at the same time as the converts mentioned at the conclusion of this chapter.

ATHENS

There were four great contrasting cities dominating the four quadrants of the Roman Empire, Alexandria in Egypt, Jerusalem in Palestine, Athens in Greece, and Rome itself over all.

It was the arrogant and sophisticated intellectual center of the whole empire; and the significant thing in this chapter is that Christianity as preached in the very eye of Greek culture, a culture which through absorption by Rome was destined to change the character of the whole empire. Even in such a center Christian truth was not without its fruit. Paul, not the philosophers, won that day in Athens.

As Everett F. Harrison, op. cit., p. 449 declared, “It has often been maintained that in Athens Paul attempted the intellectual approach and tried to be a philosopher among the philosophers, rather than preaching the simple gospel of Jesus Christ; but this is not a valid criticism.”

Paul’s message in Athens was identical with what it was everywhere he taught. The doctrine he taught regarding God, the judgment, and the resurrection of Christ was identical with Paul’s teaching everywhere. Regarding the insinuation that Paul’s intellectual approach was in any manner inadequate, it should be remembered that his epistle to the Romans is the most intellectual book ever written. In it Paul noted the intellectual objections to Christianity one by one, refuting them with a concise and unanswerable logic, and doing so in such an overwhelming and conclusive manner that none of the intellectuals of that day even dared to offer a rebuttal.

CHAPTER 18

The conclusion of the second missionary tour is recorded in this chapter and the beginning of the third. Paul left Athens for Corinth where he met Aquila and Priscilla (verses 1-4); great success attended his efforts during eighteen months work at Corinth (verses 5-11); Jewish opposition came to a climax soon after Gallio became proconsul, but it was frustrated (verses 12-17); Paul concluded the second journey via Cenchraea and Ephesus to Antioch in Syria (verses 18-23a); and after some time there, he started the third journey (verse 23b. Luke next included some background material on the work at Ephesus, where Paul's next great labors would occur, relating the preaching of Apollos, and the further instruction given him by Priscilla and Aquila. (verses 24-28)

Verse 1

No organized opposition to Paul's preaching developed in Athens, but he did not long remain there, probably because of the arrogant snobbery of the shallow intellectuals who dominated Athenian society at that time. John Wesley, *New Testament Commentary*, in loco said, "The philosophers were too easy, too indolent, and too wise in their own eyes to receive the gospel."

Luke gives nothing of the manner of Paul's journey to Corinth, and the speculation of A. C. Hervey, *Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 18, Acts ii, p. 87 is as good as any. "If (he went) by land, (it was) a forty mile or two days journey; but if by sea, a one day's sail. Lewin thinks he came by sea, that it was in winter, and that possibly one of the shipwrecks mentioned in 2 Corinthians 11:25 may have occurred at this time."

"To Corinth . . ." a significant portion of the New Testament is addressed to Christians in Corinth; and a little more attention to this city is appropriate:

CORINTH

Corinth was situated on the narrow isthmus that joins the mainland of Greece to the Peloponnesus, thus laying between the Saronic and Corinthian gulfs, ideally located for trade and commerce. The outstanding physical characteristic of the city is the Acro-Corinthus, a fantastic vertical mountain rising just south of the isthmus to a height of 1886 feet. There was a flat area on top, occupied in antiquity by a heathen temple with "one thousand religious prostitutes" dedicated to Aphrodite.

As could be expected, the city's morals were the scandal of ancient times. How great was the power of the gospel that established faith in Christ in such a center! In the times of Paul, Corinth was the capital of Achaia. Sir William M. Ramsey, *Pictures of the Apostolic Church*, op. cit., p. 201 said that Corinth was, "The greatest center of trade and exchange in Greece from the beginning of Greek history onward."

Presently, the city has faded from its former glory, having only some 17,728 population in the 1951 census. At the time Paul came to Corinth it was a more important city than Athens, and this could have influenced his cutting short the time he gave to Athens.

Verses 2-3

Scholars have advocated opposite positions with regard to whether or not Aquila and Priscilla were Christians when Paul met them. Robert Milligan, *Analysis of the New Testament*, p. 378, thought they were not, basing his view of Luke's introduction of them, not as Christians, but as being of the same trade. F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, p. 368 said, "The odds appear to be in favor of the view that they were already Christians when they left Rome." This writer agrees with Ramsay and Boles that "we do not know,"

"Claudius . . ." This edict of expelling the Jews from Rome is placed at 52 A. D. by some, and a little earlier by others.

"Aquila and Priscilla . . ." became firm and faithful friends of Paul, even saving his life on one occasion, for which they are extravagantly praised in Romans 16:3-4.

"Tentmakers . . ." All Jews, even the wealthy and learned, were taught a trade. The Jewish law, after their exile, held that a father who taught not his son a trade, taught him to be a thief." (Alexander Campbell, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 122)

Verse 4

Paul's turning to the Gentiles after rejection in the synagogues should be understood in the local sense; for he always began with the Jews wherever he went.

Verse 5

J. S. Howson, *Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, p. 303 wrote, “The news Timothy brought to Paul caused him to write those beloved converts . . . which is the first of his epistles to be preserved to us.” (Note: Howson accepted the later date of 55 or 56 A. D. for Galatians; but this writer prefers the earlier date, understanding it to have been written to the south Galatians, making it perhaps the oldest of Paul’s letters which have come down to us.)

“Devoting himself completely to the word . . .” H. Leo Boles, *Commentary on the Acts*, p. 287 wrote, “This means that Paul was engrossed by the word or engrossed by the preaching of the gospel.”

Verse 6

“When they resisted . . .” All opposition against the word of God is in reality a disaster to the one opposing, not to the gospel. “But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God’s purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John.” (New American Standard Bible)

“Blasphemed . . .” This means that they blasphemed both Paul and the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Shook out his garments . . .” This gesture was the equivalent of shaking off the dust of his feet against them. (13:51)

Verse 7

It is not indicated here that Paul transferred his residence to the house of Titus Justus, but that he taught from his house. Paul probably continued to abide in Priscilla and Aquila’s home.

Verse 8

“Crispus . . .” the ruler of the synagogue was one of the noble, or mighty, who accepted the Lord, of whom Paul said not many of them did so. This was one of those whom Paul baptized with his own hands. (1 Corinthians 1:14)

“The Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized . . .” There is only one plan of salvation for alien sinners; and here is a concise statement of it. “The one plan of salvation” also included the repentance of those who accepted Christ.

Verses 9-10

“A vision . . .” The Lord repeatedly appeared to Paul to strengthen and encourage him in his proclamation of the truth.

“No man will attack you . . .” Almost at once, there would occur the most remarkable providence on behalf of Paul, in that those who sought to harm him were themselves dispersed and one of them beaten in the presence of Gallio. This promise of the Lord did not mean that men would not assault Paul, but that they would be unsuccessful in their efforts to thwart his preaching.

“For I have many people in this city . . .” H. Leo Boles, *op. cit.*, p. 289 said, “It would appear logical to view the Lord’s statement as meaning, “That there were much people, not yet saved, but who would accept the gospel when they heard it.” We view this as a promise that Paul would convert many souls in Corinth.

Verse 11

This may be understood as covering the entire period of Paul’s work in Corinth, or, just as logically, that “having remained many days longer, took leave.” (Verse 18)

Verses 12-13

“Gallio . . .” This man was the older brother of the philosopher Seneca, advisor to Nero. He was born Marcus Annaeus Novatus; but upon being adopted by a rich man, Lucius Junius Gallio, he took the full name of “Lucius Junius Gallio Annaeus.”

A fragment discovered at Delphi in 1905 marks the beginning of this man’s proconsulship as 51 A. D.; but as Jack P. Lewis, *Historical Backgrounds of Bible History* pp. 153-155 observed, “We do not know how long he was proconsul, nor for certain whether Paul was brought before him at the beginning or end of his term. It is assumed that Gallio was proconsul only one year and that Paul was arraigned at the beginning of his term, giving the conclusion that Paul arrived in Corinth in 49-50 A. D.”

“This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law . . .” This means “contrary to Jewish law;” but as Judaism was a legal religion in Rome, the implication is that Christianity was not.

Gallio, no sooner entered into his proconsulship than the Jews descended upon him demanding action against Paul. Paul was all set to defend himself against the Jewish charges, but before he ever opened his mouth, Gallio gave sentence in his favor and dispersed the accusers.

Verses 14-16

True to the Lord's promise, Paul was protected in this encounter. Gallio's brother was a close friend of high authorities in Rome, where only recently the Jews had suffered expulsion by Claudius; and therefore he was fully confident in thus dismissing their charges abruptly. A. C. Hervey, *op. cit.*, p. 90 noted that, "He drave (drove) them . . ." as used by Demosthenes in exactly the same context, means the ignominious dismissal of the case, without its being even tried."

Verse 17

"Sosthenes . . ." was likely the successor of Crispus who had accepted the truth; and as the new leader of the synagogue he had determined to take legal action against the Christians. The people who beat him were the Greek population of Corinth who seized upon any pretext to vent their hatred of Jews. Gallio's denial of them even a hearing of their charges, and his turning away indifferently when the populace assaulted Sosthenes, terminated the Jewish efforts to use legal means against the Christians in Corinth.

John Peter Lange, *Commentary on Acts*, p. 339 observed that Gallio was right in refusing to hear charges against Paul, but that he was wrong when he turned his back on deeds of violence such as the beating of Sosthenes, indicating that, "The indifference of men to religion may lead them to be equally negligent in the administration of civil justice,"

Verse 18

"Many days longer . . ." The scene before Gallio was introduced retrospectively; and in that case, the "many days" of his place would be the time remaining in the eighteen months.

"He had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow . . ." It is grammatically possible to refer this to Aquila; but the subject of the whole paragraph appears

to be Paul, and scholars are sharply divided on the question of whose vow it was and whose head was shaved. In the light of 21:26, it is clear that Paul, as a Jew and not as a Christian might easily have done such a thing; and if he did not do so, no point could be made of it, because his friend Aquila, who was also a Christian, would hardly have done such a thing against Paul's wishes.

Rather than citing extensive arguments with reference to whom did it, we are content to say with H. Leo Boles that we simply do not know. H. Leo Boles, *op. cit.*, p. 293 said, "As a Jew Paul kept up his observance of the ceremonial law for some instances, but refused to impose it upon Gentiles."

Verse 19

"He left them there . . ." anticipates Paul's departure mentioned in the next verse; and the meaning seems to be that as Aquila and Priscilla went about establishing their residences in Ephesus, Paul did some teaching in the synagogue.

Verses 20-22

"He went up and greeted the church . . ." refers to a visit to Jerusalem, this being the fourth trip to that city since Paul's conversion.

"Went down to Antioch . . ." This was the Syrian Antioch, the "sponsoring church" as some would say today, which had sent Paul on his missionary travels. The statement in the next verse that he "spent some time there" indicates that he gave a full report of all that the Lord had done through him on the mission field.

This terminated the second missionary journey of Paul. It had required about three years. A summary of the places visited is this:

- (1) He first revisited the churches of South Galatia, Lystra, Derbe, etc.
- (2) They came to Troas where the Macedonian call occurred.
- (3) They went to Philippi where Lydia and the jailer were baptized.
- (4) Paul and Silas preached in Thessalonica.
- (5) The noble Bereans accepted the gospel.

- (6) Paul went to Athens.
- (7) He was joined by Timothy and Silas in Corinth.
- (8) Via Ephesus and Caesarea, he came to Jerusalem, and thence.
- (9) He returned to Antioch in Syria.

Verse 23a

This gives the end of Journey II and the beginning of Journey III.

Verse 23b

PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY TOUR

This journey began just like the second, with a visitation of all the congregations previously established in Galatia and Phrygia, having exactly the same purpose, namely, that of establishing the young churches in the most holy faith.

In verse 21, Paul had promised Aquila and Priscilla that he would return to them at Ephesus, the next great scene of Paul's labors; and in anticipation of that return Luke gives some background information of what was going on in Ephesus.

Verses 24-25

Although his information regarding the gospel was incomplete, he knew enough to proclaim the kingdom of God which John had declared to be "at hand" and to command people to be baptized unto the remission of sins, as John had done, declaring at the same time, of course, the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

He was a man of eloquence, learning, and great ability. No higher compliment can be paid than the one Luke gave, namely that he was mighty in the Scriptures. As appears a little later, he baptized many.

Verse 26

Strong agreement is felt with Everett F. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 453 who said, "Quite likely, Apollos was now baptized by Aquila in the name of Christ."

Verses 27-28

These two verses extol the effectiveness of Apollos in answering Jewish objections to Christ as Lord and Messiah; and his effectiveness led to support and encouragement by brethren throughout the area. It may be accepted as certain that Aquila and Priscilla were leaders in sponsoring and encouraging this effective new voice for the Lord.

Paul himself advocated and encouraged Apollos' work (1 Corinthians 16:12); and in this passage, Luke, Paul's great friend and companion, speaks of the noble Alexandrian in terms of unstinted praise and appreciation. How wonderful that among such great leaders here was no hint of jealousy.

"Go across to Achaia . . ." This indicates that Apollos went to Corinth, the capital of Achaia, where the carnality of the Corinthians promptly led to the development of a faction calling itself after Apollos. (1 Corinthians 1:12) No doubt Apollos' work there was very successful, for Paul himself affirmed that, "I planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." (1 Corinthians 3:6)

CHAPTER 19

In this chapter Luke presents the story of certain Christians who needed rebaptism (verses 1-7), a record of Paul's mighty successes in Ephesus (verses 8-13), the account of the exorcists who were exorcised (verses 14-20, a summary of Paul's further work in Asia (verses 21-22), and a full account of the uproar created by Demetrius and the shrine-makers (verses 23-41).

CHRISTIANS WHO NEEDED TO BE REBAPTIZED

Verse 1

"While Apollos was at Corinth . . ." definitely suggests that these disciples were converts made by Apollos; and that the providence of God appears in this: that, whereas Aquila and Priscilla had taught Apollos the way of the Lord more accurately, some of those whom he had inadequately instructed were found and properly taught by Paul. Aquila and Priscilla had sent Apollos on to Corinth.

“Found some disciples . . .” That these men were Christians is certainly to be inferred from the way in which Luke describes them as “disciples.”

“Through the upper country . . .” This was the country north of Ephesus.

Verse 2

“When you believed . . .” This cannot mean, as suggested by E. H. Trenchard, *A New Testament Commentary*, p. 324 that Paul expected that they had received the Spirit, merely upon their having believed; but, as E. H. Plumptre, *Elliott’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 128 said, the meaning is this, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? That is, did you receive the Holy Spirit upon your conversion and baptism? We are left to conjecture what prompted the question.”

Plumptre is correct as seeing “believed” in this verse as a synecdoche to the whole process of conversion: faith, repentance and baptism.

“Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed . . .?” To be sure, as H. Leo Boles, *Commentary on Acts*, p.298 said, “They had heard of the existence of the Holy Spirit, but not that He had been given on Pentecost.”

Verse 3

Alexander Campbell, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 126 said, “This indicates that John the Baptist’s baptism was not Christian baptism; for in the latter they could not have been baptized without hearing it.” J. R. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, p. 845 concurred in this view, saying that in the apostolic age, “It is probable that the Trinitarian formula (in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) was used in baptizing.” (Matthew 28:19)

“Into John’s baptism . . .” John’s baptism lasted only until Pentecost; but the persons who had submitted to it while it was in force were not required to be rebaptized, hence the conclusion that the disciples here were baptized into John’s baptism at a time when it was no longer valid.

A. C. Hervey, *The Pulpit Commentary, Acts*, Acts ii, p. 114 declared, “Nothing can mark more strongly the connection between baptism and the reception of the Holy Spirit than this question does. For it implies, ‘How could you be

ignorant of the giving of the Holy Spirit if you were duly baptized?” In the New Testament, the reception of the Holy Spirit was made contingent upon the baptism of penitent believers. (Acts 2:38f)

Verses 4-5

H. Leo Boles, op. cit., p. 299 noted that, “Luke does not give a formula for baptizing, but simply explains that these men were baptized in obedience to their faith in Christ.”

Verses 6-7

John Peter Lange, Commentary on Acts, p. 350 declared, “The true baptism . . . and not the imposition of hands . . . (is among) the conditions upon which the gift of the Spirit depends.”

Frederick Dale Bruner, A Theology of the Holy Spirit, p. 169, who did an incredible amount of study of this said, “Peter does not contrast the gift of the Spirit and baptism; he joins them . . . It is one of the major purposes of Acts to show that baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit belong indissolubly together. This is the special lesson of Acts 8 and 19.”

Sir William M. Ramsay, Pictures of the Apostolic Church, p. 216 seems to be correct when he supposed that, “Luke’s purpose in dwelling on this episode is to show that even Apollos’ teaching at Corinth was Pauline in character and owed its effectiveness largely to the ideas of Paul, learned through Paul’s two disciples (Aquila and Priscilla).

DISCIPLES NEEDING REBAPTISM

Are there any today whose baptism was so defective or inadequate that they should be baptized again “into the Lord Jesus”? The answer without any doubt whatever is affirmative. And who are they?

1. Those who were baptized in infancy, or at a time in childhood so early that no adequate understanding of the ordinance was possible. Millions today have never in any sense obeyed the apostolic injunction to “have yourselves baptized” as Peter commanded. (Acts 2:38) That passage

makes it absolutely clear that the convert must consciously, and of his own will, submit to Christian baptism.

2. Those whose baptism was by some action other than the immersion submitted to by Christ, taught by the apostles, and practiced by the apostolic church, which action was denominated by the Holy Spirit as a figure of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, (Romans 6:3-5), making it certain that forms of baptism (so-called) without such a likeness are invalid.
3. Those whose baptism was an action initiated by others, not themselves, or whose baptism was in their hearts undertaken for any unscriptural purpose, such as (a) merely going with the group, (b) primarily to please parents, husband, wife, or other persons, or (c) any purpose other than that of surrendering the soul to the Lord as commanded in the gospel and for the purpose of coming “into Christ,” receiving the forgiveness of sins and the promise of the Holy Spirit.
4. Those whose baptism was understood by them as having no connection with salvation, or as being, in their view absolutely unnecessary, irrelevant, or unessential.
5. Those whose baptism, instead of being “into Christ,” was into some organization unknown to the Scripture, operating contrary to New Testament authority, and constituting some kind of fellowship than that of Christians “in Christ.”

This writer earnestly prays that all who read these lines will ask himself or herself in all humility, “Was I scripturally baptized?” If the answer is negative, the rebaptism of these twelve disciples at Ephesus, long ago, provides an inspiring example of what should be done.

Note: One hundred sixty-nine times, in the writings of Paul alone, the New Testament uses the expression “in Christ,” “in Him,” or its equivalent; and that says as loudly as it could be said that this purpose of Christian baptism is absolutely vital and should be honored by all men. (Romans 6:3-5; Galatians 3:26-27)

PAUL'S MIGHTY DEEDS IN EPHESUS

Verse 8

Don De Welt, *op. cit.*, p. 258 said, "Now here is a question: If Paul established a church in Ephesus by "reasoning and persuading concerning the kingdom of God," what must then be the relationship of the kingdom of God and the church? There is only one conclusion, and that is that the kingdom of God and the church are one and the same institution."

Verse 9

"Some were becoming hardened and disobedient . . ." speaking evil of the Way, with regard to God's hardening of willful sinners. Paul withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. (Nothing is known of Tyrannus.)

Verse 10

Paul previously had wanted to preach in Asia but was forbidden (16:6); now it was different, and tremendous success attended his efforts. Don De Welt, *op. cit.*, p. 258 believed that, "The Seven churches of Asia referred to in Revelation 1:4, as well as the church at Colossae (Colossians 1:2), were doubtless established at this time."

Joseph Benson, *One Volume New Testament Commentary*, *in loco*, agreed, saying, "The fame of the apostle's doctrine and miracles brought multitudes to Ephesus from distant parts and these, being converted, preached the gospel in their own cities, and founded those churches which the apostle tells the Colossians had not seen him face to face, (Colossians 2:1)."

"Asia . . ." here means, not the continent, but the proconsular Roman province of Asia, of which Ephesus was the capital.

Verses 11-12

"Extraordinary miracles . . ." From this it is clear that the miracles of healing by means of aprons, etc., taken from Paul's body to the distressed, must be allowed as genuine, for the word "inasmuch" clearly shows this. Perhaps, as J. R. Dummelow, *op. cit.*, p. 845 said, "God condescended to work miracles through

these handkerchiefs, having regard to the genuine faith of those who thus used them, and not to their superstition.” W. R. Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 54 said, “Such healings were so rare that Luke calls them “special (extraordinary) miracles.”

THE EXORCISTS EXORCISED!

Verses 13-14

The very fact of these exorcists pretending to use the name of Jesus proves that they had no confidence in the methods they had been using; for if their previous methods had been effective, there would have been no need for a change. They had recognized the great power of Jesus’ name, as used by Paul; hence their presumption in seeking to appropriate such a power to their own purposes. Ancient superstitions attributed unusual powers to the seventh son of a seventh son.

Verse 15

It was appropriate enough that the demon himself, working through his victim, should have exposed and denounced such a wicked attempt to appropriate a precious and holy name to the promotion of evil enterprises. The lesson should be clear to all, that no man has a right merely to appropriate the name of Jesus.

How does one become a rightful and lawful wearer of the name of Jesus? In this very chapter it is declared that men were, “baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus (19:5); and the Scriptures reveal no honorable alternative to that means of being entitled to His Holy name.

Verse 16

“Subdued both of them . . .” Apparently only two of the seven brothers were involved in this episode, as indicated by the word “both.” Their defeat was sudden, dramatic, and overwhelming. F. F. Bruce, *Ibid*, p. 390 said, “They employed the name of Jesus in an attempt to imitate Paul’s exorcism; but when they tried to use it, like an unfamiliar weapon wrongfully handled, it exploded in their hands.”

Many have noted an element of humor in Luke's words here to the effect that "casters out" were themselves "cast out"!

Verse 17

The tremendous results which followed the discomfiture of the ambitious, "seven sons" was brought about by the widespread interest in a place like Ephesus in magical arts of witchcraft, etc. Thus it came about that in such a climate dominated by the works of darkness, the victory of the name of Jesus over would-be exorcists was just the kind of thing to have produced the results Luke mentioned.

Verse 18

At Corinth, many of the Christians came from among those who have been involved in the grossest of sins (1 Corinthians 6:9-11); and so it was here, that among the Christians were many who had been involved in the black arts of magic. Upon beholding the truth, however, they forsook their evil ways.

Verse 19

It is a shame that in our own times all kinds of spiritualists, fortune-tellers, palm-readers, and voodoo specialists are operating in the same manner as those ancient sinners. Ever since this event at Ephesus, Satan and his advocates have been screaming about the "book burners;" but it surely must be true that many books today deserve the same fate.

"Fifty thousand pieces of silver . . ." This was an immense sum, no matter how figured. A. C. Hervey wrote, "The "pieces" were Greek coins, calculating the value at 1,815 English pounds (\$9,000.00 at the old rate), and John Wesley, *op. cit.*, in loco, supposing the "pieces" were Jewish shekels, gave the value as 6,250 English pounds (\$35,000.00).

Verse 20

During this period of some two years and three months, or "three years" as Paul referred to it, extensive growth and development attended the preaching of the gospel. Churches sprang up everywhere. Countless thousands became Christians; and many public officials and leaders of the people became friendly

to the apostolic preachers, as is clearly evidenced by the event Luke next reported. (19:23ff)

Verses 21-22

“Purposed in the spirit . . . I must also see Rome . . .” Paul’s plans were made prayerfully and with his considered best judgment; and here is the first historical mention of his vows of going to Rome, a purpose often thwarted, until at last, in circumstances he could never have dreamed of, he came down the Appian way, between two soldiers, wearing a chain.

John Wesley, *Ibid*, has a moving comment on the breadth of vision, and the daring courage, of this mighty apostle. He said, “Paul sought not to rest, but pressed on as if he had yet done nothing. He is already possessed of Ephesus and Asia; but he purposes for Macedonia and Achaia. He has his eye upon Jerusalem, then upon Rome, afterward of Spain. (Romans 15:24) No Caesar, no Alexander the Great, no other hero comes up to the magnanimity of this little Benjamite. Faith and love to God and man had enlarged his heart, even as the sand of the sea.”

Timothy and Erastus . . .” Timothy frequently traveled with Paul; and, again and again, made excursions in Paul’s name to visit the young churches. (17:16-17)

Timothy . . .” He was sent into Macedonia; and the purpose of his mission is clear from 1 Corinthians 4:17. E. H. Plumptre, *op. cit.*, p. 132 said, “He was sent on in advance to warn and exhort, saving the apostle from the necessity of using severity when he himself arrived.”

First and Second Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans all belong to the period of Paul’s third missionary journey.

THE RIOT AT EPHEBUS

Only a miserable village remains near the site of this once proud city of a third of a million. Its history reaches back more than a millennium B. C.; but it was the Ionians who built the first of five great temples dedicated to the ancient fertility goddess, Artemis, giving the name “Ionian” to the distinctive columns which adorned the temples. The history of Ephesus is, in fact, the history of

those temples. The fourth temple burned the night Alexander the great was born (October 356 B.C., and by 350 B.C. the fifth was under construction, requiring some 120 years to build.

The location of the fifth temple of Artemis was about a mile from Ephesus, NNE of the city on a level plain, the city itself occupying a strategic location on the Cayster River.

The temple's center of devotion was an image of Artemis which reportedly fell from heaven, the same being no doubt a meteorite, the many strange blobs upon which gave a rough appearance of a many-breasted female, encased from the waist downward in a coffin.

The temple was a vast structure, four times the size of the Greek Parthenon of Pericles, having some 89,000 square feet. (Note: The Encyclopedia Britannica and the New Bible Dictionary provide the above information on Ephesus and the temple of Artemis.)

The great Ephesian temple of Artemis (loosely identified with Diana) was ranked by ancient writers as one of the "seven wonders of the world." The principle industry of Ephesus was that of manufacturing and selling images.

"Demetrius . . ." This man was a thorough pagan, named after one of the agricultural gods whose worship had been absorbed by the temple; he was the embodiment of selfishness and carnality.

Verse 26

"Are no gods at all . . ." By this, Demetrius committed himself to the proposition opposite, namely, that their shrines were real gods. This is a glimpse of the practical fact regarding images, that being that they are indeed considered "gods" by the persons using them.

It is likely that Demetrius exaggerated the success of Paul; but even if he did, the insight which he had regarding the eventful fate of the shrine business was accurate. E. H. Plumptre, *op. cit.*, p. 133 wrote, "Pliny in his epistle to Trajan (Ep. X, p. 96), half a century later spoke of "deserted temples," "worship neglected," and "hardly a single purchaser" found for sacrificial victims."

Verse 27

“Diana . . .” The Greek here is Artemis (RV margin); and although Artemis might be loosely identified as Diana, it would have been better to translate it like it is.

“Should even be dethroned . . .” This indeed came to pass. A mighty church was founded in Ephesus; and, with the advance of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire, the shrines and temples of pagan gods and goddess fell into ruin. In 262 A.D. it was sacked and ruined by the Goths; and in 389 A.D. the Edict of Theodosius banned the remnant of the pagan cult which continued 127 years after the temple was destroyed.

Verses 28-29

“Great is Diana of the Ephesians . . .” When Elijah contested with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, the priests of Baal carried on a continuous shout for hours, crying, “O Baal, hear us” (1 Kings 18:28); and in recent decades the followers of Adolf Hitler in Germany reinforced Hitler’s propaganda with similar chants in unison. Then, as always, it was a device of ignorance and prejudice.

“Into the theater . . .” This “theater” was an immense open-air theatre, capable of seating 50,000 people, or at least as some suppose 25,000 people.

“Gaius and Aristarchus . . .” A Gaius (20:4) was Paul’s companion, but was here said to have been of Derbe; Paul baptized a Gaius in Corinth with his own hands! (Corinthians 1:14); and a Gaius was Paul’s host in Corinth when Romans was written (Romans 16:23); and the apostle John addressed his Third Epistle to Gaius. This was a common name.

“Aristarchus . . .” was a Thessalonian (20:4), thus also a Macedonian; and from other references in Acts 27:2, Colossians 4:10, and Philemon 24, it appears that he continued with Paul through thick and thin. A. C. Hervey, *op. cit.*, p. 119 wrote, “He continued through good report and evil report, through persecution, violence, shipwreck, imprisonment and bonds, to the latest moment on which the light of Bible history shines—blessed servant of Christ; blessed fellow-servant of his chief apostle.”

The reason for seizing these two fellow-workers of Paul was likely that of doing bodily injury.

Verse 30

Paul may have intended to divert the danger threatening Gaius and Aristarchus, hoping also, no doubt to address the multitude. However, the danger that Paul would be killed was so great that the disciples restrained him from doing anything so rash.

Verse 31

The Asiarchs were men of the highest rank, being invariably chosen from among the wealthiest of the people. "They were ten in number, representing the ten cities of Proconsular Asia; they presided over all sacred rites." One of the requirements of their office was that they should provide at their own expense the public games in honor of the gods and the deity of the emperor.

Verses 32-34

This was a providential interruption of any effective movement against Paul that the mob leaders might have had in mind. Evidently the Jews, who were also opposed to images, were afraid that the hostility of the mob might overflow against themselves also; and presumably, the purpose of the Jews in thrusting forward Alexander to make a speech was that of dissociating the Jews from the Christians. The mob, however, refused to hear him, there being much prejudice against Jews also; and to drown out Alexander, they shouted for two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians."

Such an effort would have dissipated much of the fierce energy of the crowd, opening the way for the dismissal of the unruly throng by the highest official in the city, a little later.

Verse 35

"Quieting the crowd . . ." This in all probability would have been impossible until the frenzy of the mob had so thoroughly vented itself in the inane tribute to Diana, covering more than two hours.

“The town-clerk . . .” This was the city secretary, or scribe; and, according to A. C. Hervey, *Ibid.*, p. 120, “Was an office of first-rate influence among the Greek cities of Asia.”

The possibility that the office of proconsul was held jointly at that time by two people, makes it likely that he was the highest authority in the city at that time.

“Is guardian (temple-keeper) of the temple of the great Artemis . . .” He was held in highest esteem by cities thus designated; and the use of it here tended to palliate and diminish the savage passions of the mob.

Verse 36

Having procured their attention by a few well-chosen remarks, the town-clerk proceeded to call for order, pointing out that such an outburst could cause the city to lose some of its privileges.

Verses 37-38

“Neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers . . .” A marvelous insight into Paul’s method of preaching appears quite incidentally here. He did not blaspheme pagan deities, nor indulge any violent or destructive operations against the pagan temples. H. Leo Boles, *op. cit.*, p. 313 observed, “He preached positive truths, rather than making a direct attack on their error.”

“These men . . . are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers . . .” John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. i, p. 83 said, “Since the town-clerk at Ephesus defends Paul and his colleagues against any such charges as robbing temples, we cannot suppose this wrong was one to which the Jews were entirely immune.”

Verse 39

“The Lawful assembly . . .” The assembly in progress was an illegal assembly, having all the characteristics of a mob; and by such a reference the town-clerk cast a serious reflection upon the entire riot. Illegal assemblies were punishable by the Roman authorities.

Verses 40-41

One has to admire the intelligence, tact, and ability by which the town-clerk achieved a dispersal of such a mob. First, he pointed out that the whole city might be “in danger” for tolerating such an illegal uproar; but then he softened his reference to the riot by calling it a “concourse.” This indicated that he was willing to convey some semblance of legality to the mob by naming it a concourse instead of a riot; then, moving still further to legalize the outrageous gathering, he “dismissed the assembly!” In context, that town-clerk’s actions bore the stamp of genius. Once more the providence of God had preserved the life of the dauntless apostle, saving him and protecting him, without his so much as opening his mouth. How wonderful are the ways of the Lord.

CHAPTER 20

The first six verses give a summary of many months of Paul’s travels; (verses 1-6); a special account of Paul and company taking the Lord’s supper at Troas is given (verses 7-12); Paul continued his trip to Jerusalem (verses 13-16); he called for a meeting with the Ephesian elders, bidding them farewell (verses 17-35); and a special account of the tearful farewell is given (verses 36-38).

Acts omits many of the things men are naturally curious about; but the Holy Spirit never catered to human curiosity.

Verse 1

“Paul sent for the disciples . . .” indicates that Paul had probably been protected in some place of safety; but immediately after the uproar was over, and having already planned to go to Macedonia (19:21), decided to begin that journey at once. The passions of the mob would not soon be fully abated; and, rather than cause his friends any further anxiety, he left for Macedonia. The Macedonian detour, however, was part of the more extended trip to Jerusalem. Sir William M. Ramsay, *Pictures of the Apostolic Church*, p. 235 noted this, “Paul’s third missionary journey ends, like his second, with a visit to Jerusalem; but whereas the earlier visit is dismissed in a few words (18:21, 22), this later visit is described at great lengths and in much detail.”

Verse 2

“Greece . . .” is the name of the district that included Athens and Corinth. The First Corinthian letter had been dispatched to Corinth during the final months at Ephesus; and during Paul’s three months in Corinth (included in this reference to Greece), he wrote the magnificent book of Romans, sending it from Cenchraea by Phoebe. The date often assigned for Romans is 55 or 56 A.D.

Prior to these three months in Corinth, however, and while he was in Macedonia, Paul had written the Second Corinthian letter.

Verse 3

“A plot was formed against him . . .” J. R. Dummelow, *Ibid.*, thought this “was a plot to kill Paul on board the Jewish pilgrim ship in which he had taken his passage.” As Paul was carrying a large sum of money to Jerusalem to be distributed among the poor Christians there, it would have been much easier than ordinary to recruit men to slay him.

Verse 4

It is noteworthy that Paul took no chance of handling the money he had collected without taking the utmost precautions, not only for the safety of the funds, but also to avoid any charge of laxity on his part. He was not about to carry that large sum to Jerusalem without attendants and witnesses of the whole transaction.

Verse 5

The group had probably been throughout the area collecting funds for the charity in Jerusalem; and this led to their being temporarily separated.

Verse 6

“We . . .” Here begins again the famous “we” passages of Acts, indicating that the physician Luke, author of this narrative, had rejoined Paul.

“At Troas in five Days . . .” This same journey had required only one day's sail (16:11) in the opposite direction upon the occasion of another crossing; hence the conclusion the ship encountered unfavorable winds.

“We stayed seven days . . .” Presumably, this delay from Tuesday till the following Monday was to enable the missionary group with Paul to observe the Lord’s supper with the church in Troas.

“The days of Unleavened Bread . . .” refers to Passover week. It is far more likely, however, that Luke in these words merely indicated the time of the year.

TROAS

This seaport, situated at the western extremity of Asia, upon or near the site of ancient Troy, was rebuilt by the successors of Alexander the Great who renamed the place, Alexandria Troas.

The importance of the place in New Testament history derives its being:

- (1) the place where Paul met Luke (16:8-11),
- (2) the gateway from Asia to Europe where a “door opened” for Paul (2 Corinthians 2:12),
- (3) the scene of the remarkably important Lord’s day services (20:7-12), and if the deduction of E. M. Blaiklock’s, *Cities of the New Testament*, p. 38, is correct,
- (4) the scene of Paul’s final arrest, (2 Timothy 4:13). “Why did Paul leave his garment at Troas? Inhuman arrest, apparently, denied him the comfort of adequate clothing.”

Verse 7

“First day of the week when we were gathered together to break bread . . .” This emphatically states the purpose of Christian assemblies on Sundays throughout history, that purpose being for the observance of Lord’s Supper. John Peter Lange, *Commentary on Acts*, p. 368 said, “Luke’s language here plainly indicates that this day (Sunday) was precisely one on which assemblies for religious services were customarily held.”

Everett F. Harrison, *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 459 complained that, “We are not told when or how the practice of Sunday worship arose in the church;” but one does not need to seek any later than the day of the resurrection of our Lord for the beginning of it.

On successive Sundays, Jesus appeared to the apostles on the day He arose from the grave (John 20:19), Thomas being absent; and again on the following Sunday (Thomas being present) (John 20:26), He appeared to them again. There can be little doubt that Sunday services of Christians began with those two appearances of our Lord in their assemblies on successive Sundays.

Henry Melvill Gwatkin, *Selections from Early Writers*, p. 29 wrote that Pliny's letter to the Emperor Trajan, written in the shadow of the apostolic age (112 A. D.) declared of the Christians that, "It was their habit on a fixed day to assemble before daylight and sing . . . After this was done, their custom was to depart and meet again to take food, but ordinary and harmless food."

It is easy in Pliny's report to observe a reference to the Lord's Supper; and the significance of "on a fixed day" is therefore, of the very greatest magnitude. The Christians, from earliest times, had the habit of meeting for the Lord's Supper on "a fixed day,) and Acts 20:7 identifies that day as "The first day of the week," Sunday.

"To break bread . . . J. R. Dummelow, *op. cit.*, p. 846 said that means, "To celebrate the Lord's Supper." "Paul began talking to them . . ." Even the address of so distinguished an apostle as Paul took second billing on that occasion, the primary purpose having been to observe the Lord's supper; that is why no ordinary meal can be understood of this "breaking bread."

"He prolonged his message until midnight . . ." Perhaps it should be noted as John Peter Lange said: "The example of Paul affords no excuse for sermons that are of immoderate length!"

Verse 8

Many have speculated as to why Luke mentioned a thing of this kind, some connecting it with the overheating and improper ventilation of the room. A. C. Hervey, *the Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 18, Acts ii, p. 144 said, "It is the casual mention by an eyewitness of a fact that struck him."

Verse 9

It should be remembered that this was a three-story fall. As F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 408 said, "No wonder he was taken up dead, as Luke says, implying

apparently that, as a physician, he had satisfied himself on the point . . . Paul's words, 'for his life is in him' should not be pressed to mean that he was actually not dead."

We are grateful to Bruce for such a comment. The rationalizing of New Testament miracles is a devilish device; and believing in Christ should have no part in such wickedness.

It is impossible to believe that if Eutychus was not actually dead, that his loved ones, friends, and other members of the congregation would not have appealed to the physician Luke. As a matter of fact, they did; for nobody in similar circumstances would appeal to a preacher first. It was only when Luke pronounced him dead that Paul entered the picture.

Verses 10-12

"Broken the bread and eaten . . ." Note: The "breaking of the bread" in this place has no reference at all to the Lord's Supper but to the satisfaction of their hunger, as plainly implied by the verb "eaten." It was now long past midnight, and the Lord's Supper had been observed on the Sunday when they came together for that purpose.

Luke here emphatically indicated that Paul's preaching was not the purpose of the Sunday gathering, but a benefit that came subsequently to the observance of the Lord's Supper. A. C. Hervey, *op. cit.*, p. 144 went so far as to say that the word "eaten" as used in verse 11, "Is never used of the sacramental eating of bread."

Robert Milligan, *Analysis of the New Testament*, p. 386 agreed, "That the reference here is "to a common meal."

"Until daybreak . . ." Such was the love and affection of the brethren for the beloved Paul that they spent the whole night listening and talking to him.

"And they took away the boy alive . . ." It was quite easy for people who had just witnessed a resurrection to stay up all night; and Luke's words, "Were greatly comforted," is a Divine understatement for the sake of emphasis.

TRIP TO JERUSALEM RESUMED

Verse 13

J. W. McGarvey, Commentary on Acts, ii, p. 182 wrote, “Troas and Assos are on opposite sides of a peninsula which terminates in Cape Lectum;” and the distance between those cities is only twenty miles by land, but more than twice that by sea; hence it was not difficult for Paul to walk overland and again board the ship when it arrived at Assos. But why? This is especially pertinent in view of his having been up the entire night before. Mc Garvey’s, explanation is that Paul was saddened by the farewells he was encountering along the way and by the knowledge imparted to him by prophets like Agabus to the effect that bonds and imprisonment awaited him. Therefore, “He longed for a season of meditation and prayer which could be found only in solitude.”

Verses 14-16

The journey to Jerusalem by Paul and his company was made in a trading ship stopping at numerous places along the coast of the NE Mediterranean and SW coast of Asia Minor. Paul did not wish to visit Ephesus, due to lack of time, and the certainty that he would be detained if he went there; but when he learned how long the ship would be at Miletus, which was only about thirty miles from Ephesus, he sent a messenger and invited the Ephesian elders to meet him there.

“The day of Pentecost . . .” Paul’s desire to be at Jerusalem then was due to the gathering in Jerusalem on such an occasion of so many from so many different places.

Verse 17

“Elders of the church . . .” These are the same men addressed as “bishops” in verse 28. There was a plurality of elders in every church.

PAUL'S ADDRESS TO THE EPHESIAN ELDERS

Verse 18

Paul's appeal was made more meaningful to them by his reminder of the hardships and sufferings he endured among them, and the fact of his laboring with his hands to support himself and others.

Verse 19

Paul's hardships and trials were of epic proportions, as the bare catalogue of them (2 Corinthians 11:23-33) proves. Even the journey upon which he was then embarked had been drastically revised due to a plot against his life. (20:3)

"Tears . . ." This mention of Paul's weeping was repeated later (verse 31); and from this it may be concluded that there were many occasions when the great apostle poured out his grief, disappointment, and frustrated love of his countrymen in tears.

Verse 20

"From house to house . . ." This phrase of the Christian ministry is despised by some, even some churches, who rank their "personal workers" rather low on their ecclesiastical totem poles; but the truth is that the greatest of the apostles utilized the power of house-to-house and person-to-person evangelism; and all of the ministers of Christ in every generation who have despised or neglected this method have impoverished both themselves and their charges.

PERSONAL WORK

There is no substitute for personal work; just what other kind is there, anyway? Only by face-to-face, person-to-person contact with souls who would be won for the Master can there be the development of the ties of brotherhood and affection which so clearly distinguished the relationship between Paul and his converts. If ministers would build up their churches, let them visit, not merely the affluent, the powerful, and the socially prominent, but extensively and without discrimination. A minister's "little clique" is as nauseating a disgrace as may be found anywhere. There are no examples of churches anywhere that were ever built up without personal visitation.

Verse 21

“Repentance . . . and faith . . . are not mentioned here in the chronological sequence of their occurrence in sinner’s hearts. Faith always comes from hearing God’s word before repentance can appear in any heart.

“Our Lord Jesus Christ . . .” This use of the compound name “Jesus Christ” is extensive in the Pauline epistles. Luke accurately reported the use of this title here, in the year 55 A. D.

Verses 22-23

“The Holy Spirit . . . testifies to me . . .” How did the Holy Spirit testify to Paul? We might not have known unless Luke, a little later (21:10-11), had revealed the manner of it. It was not by means of dreams, premonitions, or any subjective impressions borne inward upon Paul’s consciousness; but it was by words clearly spoken by a prophet of the Lord.

There are just two ways revealed in the New Testament which are recognized as the Spirit’s “testifying” to men:

- (1) the manner of a prophet speaking God’s word, and
- (2) the testimony of the authentic scriptures. (Hebrews 10:15-18)

Verse 24

The unselfish devotion of Paul to the Christian gospel was too intense and fervent to be diminished by considerations of his personal safety.

Verse 25

In this and the preceding verse, two things of surpassing importance are revealed:

- (1) “Testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God” (verse 24) and establishing churches everywhere—this is exactly the same thing as “preaching the kingdom” (verse 25).
- (2) “Will see my face no more . . .” Paul did not say how he knew this, refraining from attributing the knowledge to any direct word from the Holy Spirit.

J. R. Dummelow, op. cit., p. 846 said, "Paul was not speaking as a prophet, but was merely giving utterance to an overpowering presentiment that the time of his death was near. As a matter of fact his life was preserved many years; and he subsequently revisited Miletus (2 Timothy 4:32), Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3; 3:40, and other places in Asia."

H. Leo Boles, Commentary on Acts, p. 325 affirmed that, "We do not know that Paul ever saw Ephesus again."

Verse 26

This was true, as next stated, because he had proclaimed without omission or partiality all of God's word to those whom he taught.

Verse 27

It is not merely "God's word" which saves, but "all of God's word." To live, men must heed "every word." (Matthew 4:4) A mere smattering of religious truth is insufficient; it is only by heeding the "whole counsel of God" that either an individual or a church may be considered in the line of duty.

Verse 28

"The Holy Spirit has made you overseers . . ." How had the Holy Spirit made these men overseers? The Holy Spirit had given the qualifications for men to meet in order to qualify for the office and had commanded that they should be appointed.

"Church of God which He purchased with His own blood . . ." No verse in the New Testament, nor any other statement that could be imagined, could possibly exceed the power of this in declaring the eternal importance and necessity of the church Christ established.

Note: This is one of ten New Testament references to Jesus as "God," and no matter how offensive this may be to human ears the plain truth is that the sacred text here is unassailable. No critic may intelligently deny that what is written, "The church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

The apostle John referred to Christ as “the only begotten God” (John 1:18). Both the Johanine reference and the passage here, however, have been mistranslated deliberately by the scholars.

Here the heretical notion of salvation “by faith alone” is shattered and countermanded forever. By any definition, salvation by “faith alone” means salvation without the church of Jesus Christ; and in such a view the crucifixion of our Lord is reduced to the status of a senseless murder. If men are saved, in any sense by the blood of Jesus, they must be saved through the church of which that blood is here declared to be the purchase price.

If any person can be saved without the church, then all men may be so saved; and such a proposition is emphatically contradicted and denied by Paul’s words here.

Verses 29-30

This is one of several extensive passages in the New Testament foretelling the great apostasy which would come about through the development of the historical church,

“From among your selves . . . “ indicates that the central apostasy would concern the government of the church; and as Protestants have often affirmed, “The Pope himself is only an elder gone wrong!”

Verse 31

J. R. Dummelow, op. cit., p. 847 said Paul’s warning was not properly heeded, “From the Epistles of John, written from Ephesus, we learn that the Ephesian heresies were of the Gnostic and Docetic types. John’s chief opponent at Ephesus was Cerinthus, who taught a Jewish form of Gnosticism.”

By the time of the writing of Revelation, the Ephesians had “fallen” from their first love, and were in a spiritual condition leading to the eventual removal of their candlestick.

Verse 32

“The word of His grace . . .” appears here as the great means of building one up in the holy faith. Only the word of God, received, studied, obeyed, loved,

preached, and honored by men can affect any true spirituality or in any manner build up the followers of Jesus.

“To give you the inheritance . . .” When all is said and done, the great gift of eternal redemption is a gift of the Father in heaven. Meeting the tests of faith, obeying the gospel, walking in the steps of Abraham’s faith—however well men may obey, the great gift is yet a gift.

“Among all those who are sanctified . . .” This is one of many names applied to the community of the saved.

Verses 34-35

Paul worked as a tent-maker to earn funds for himself and his co-workers on the mission field; and the imagination quite easily sees the gesture which accompanied the words, “these hands.”

“I showed you that . . .” Nothing corrupts religion more rapidly than the provision of rich payments for the teachers, the payments having a tendency to attract self-seekers who care not for the truth, but only for the payments and something additional. Paul set an example of faith that shall live forever. This is not to deny faithful ministers of the word their right of maintenance, which Paul himself diligently defended; but to point out the undeniable danger.

“It is more blessed to give than to receive . . .” How opposite to the convictions of men are these words! In a society where the end and all of living is “getting,” these words have a heavenly ring.

THE TEARFUL FAREWELL

Verse 36

The New Testament does not bind any special “attitude” of prayer upon the Lord’s followers; but, in this, as in the matter of His sacrifices, Paul is doubtless an example for all.

“He knelt down and prayed . . .” is the most natural of all prayerful attitudes. Jesus observed it (Luke 22:41), and the martyr Stephen, while they were stoning him to death, knelt in prayer. (Acts 7:60)

Verses 37-38

J. R. Dummelow, *Ibid.*, put it, “This is a striking example of the intense affection which the apostle’s converts felt for him.” “They were accompanying him to the ship . . .” This custom of going with a departing guest as far as possible or convenient was repeatedly observed by Paul’s converts; and we shall meet with it again and again. An element of sorrow remains as one contemplated this fond farewell on the seashore at Miletus. The greatest of all human preachers was on the way to prison, and eventually to death; and those whom he loved watered the occasion with their tears.

CHAPTER 21

Paul begins his third journey with a straight course to Tyre, (verses 1-15). This journey concluded in Jerusalem, (verses 17-26). Luke’s account of these events, although very brief, is of keen interest.

The great feature of this chapter, however, is that of Paul’s being mobbed in the temple and rescued by the Romans who took him into protective custody, beginning a long period of imprisonment for the apostle Paul, an imprisonment that would not end until Satan had enlisted the Roman Empire as a persecutor of the church.

Verse 1

Rhodes is a tiny island famous for its cultivation of roses, was also noted for the giant Colossus of Greek fame, with conquering limbs astride from land to land. The mighty Colossus of Rhodes, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, a giant bronze statue astride the harbor on its eastern extremity. It stood 105 feet high, having been erected by Chares of Lindus in 300 B.C. After standing only 56 years, it was tumbled and fragmented by an earthquake in 244 B.C.; but the ruins of this enormous wonder were a notable attraction till they were finally sold as scrap metal to a Jewish dealer in 656 A. D., who required 900 camels to transport “the remains.” (Albert Baner, *Notes on the New Testament, Acts*, p. 301. Note: The above is a fair example of the interest which attaches to every point mentioned by Luke in this passage. Before leaving “The Colossus,” it

should be pointed out that, *The New Bible Dictionary*, p. 1239 says, “The notion that it once stood astride over the entrance to the harbor is a mediaeval fiction.”

The Greek text, “We had parted from them . . .” is better understood as A. C. Hervey, *Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 18, p. 169 noted, “The Greek text here has the meaning of, “When we had torn ourselves away.” This indicates the intense emotions of the parting from Miletus.

Verse 2

The ship Paul and company had been using was a “tramp vessel,” making many stops; and here the chance to speed up their journey came through the timely availability of a ship bound directly for Tyre. A. C. Hervey, *Ibid.*, p. 170 said, “This meant the voyage would be shortened by many days.”

Verse 3

This was a remarkable fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. “To bring your sons from afar, their silver and their gold with them, for the name of the Lord your God, and for The Holy One of Israel because, He has glorified you.” (Isaiah 60:9)

The sons of God, coming from afar, laden with gold and silver, unto the name of the Lord (in the person of His disciples)—all of this is remarkably applicable to what took place here. In addition, the “ships of Tarshish” were invariably associated with places “like Joppa and Tyre.”

Verse 4

“Looking up the disciples . . .” would seem to indicate some little search before the company of believers (perhaps small) was located.

This sail to Tyre was a distance of 340 miles; but in view of the prevailing winds at that time of the year, J. S. Howson, *Life and Epistles of Saint Paul*, p. 562, wrote, “The voyage might easily have been accomplished in forty-eight hours.”

“We stayed there seven days . . .” E. H. Plumptre, Elliott’s Commentary on the Whole Bible, Vol. VII, p. 144 observed that the purpose here of the seven days’ stay was to enable the missionaries to observe the Lord’s Supper with the Christians at Tyre: “The seven days’ stay, as at Troas (20:6), and afterward at Puteoli (28:14), was obviously for the purpose of attending one, or possibly more than one meeting of the church for the Lord’s Supper on the Lord’s day.”

“Telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem . . .” The Holy Spirit had repeatedly revealed that bonds and imprisonment awaited Paul in Jerusalem. The words here, then, should be viewed, not as a mandate of the Holy Spirit, but as a conclusion reached by the disciples who so dearly loved Paul and wished to protect him from danger. A. C. Hervey, *op. cit.*, p. 170 wrote, “The inference that he should not go to Jerusalem was their own,” that is, of the disciples.

Verses 5-6

Albert Barnes, *op. cit.*, p. 303 viewed this episode as proof that New Testament Christians did not follow any prescribed form of prayer, but that prayers were offered extemporaneously at any convenient time or place. He said, “No man can read this narrative in a dispassionate manner without believing that they offered an extemporaneously prayer. No man can believe that Paul thus poured out the emotions of his heart in a prescribed form of words.”

“They returned home again . . .” There is the suppressed longing of the heart for home in Luke’s words here. He, with Paul and their fellow-travelers, went aboard ship; but they went home.

Luke and Paul went to the savage mob in Jerusalem, and chains, and long waiting for justice that never came, and at last, a voyage that led to a shipwreck on Malta, and the military barracks in Rome. Don De Welt, *Acts Made Actual*, p. 278 said, “I can read into the closing words of Luke a certain loneliness that he must have felt . . . “But they returned home again.

Verse 7

“When we had finished the voyage from Tyre . . .” A. C. Hervey, *op. cit.*, p. 170 and others believed that the Greek words used here indicate that “the sea voyage ended here,” and that the balance of the journey to Jerusalem was on foot.

“Greeting the brethren . . .” This was a favorite word both of Paul and of Luke; Paul used it more than a dozen times in the 16th chapter of Romans. It carried the meaning of a fervent greeting of fellow-Christians.

Verse 8

“Philip the evangelist . . .” R. Milligan, *Analysis of the New Testament*, p. 389 said, “This title was given to those who went from place to place proclaiming the gospel.” Timothy was another evangelist in the New Testament sense. (2 Timothy 4:5)

“We stayed with him . . .” J. W. McGarvey, *Commentary on Acts ii*, p.199 said, “This house must have been a capacious one, as it enabled him to entertain nine men who made up Paul’s company.”

Philip had evangelized the cities of the coastal area from southward of Caesarea; where, after his preaching many places, he had settled down in Caesarea, his large house indicating that he was a man of considerable means, incidentally disproving the “communism” which some think they find in the New Testament.

Verse 9

G. H. C. MacGreggor, *Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. IX, p. 278 noted that, “The absence of any statement as to what the daughters of Philip did or said is a sign that here we have the account of an eyewitness.”

They were not evangelists. They were called prophetesses. The mention of their being unmarried “virgins,” Orin Root, *Acts*, p. 164 says, “is only an interesting detail and carries no religious significance.”

F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, p. 424 said, “The daughters who lived to great age were highly esteemed as informants concerning persons and events” of the early years of Christianity.

It should be remembered that Paul was imprisoned here at Caesarea for two whole years; and there can hardly be any doubt that Luke, who was with him (though not imprisoned), would have highly prized information acquired during that period, making use of such information “in the composition of his twofold work.” (F. F. Bruce, *Ibid*)

Verses 10-12

“Agabus . . .” The prophecy here delivered by this man is exceedingly important as showing “how” the Holy Spirit testified to Paul in every city that bonds and imprisonment awaited him. It was through plain words spoken by the Holy Spirit through a prophet, that Paul received such information.

“Bound his own feet and hands . . .” Implicit in Agabus’ prophecy is that the binding of Paul would occur in Jerusalem is the fact that the Holy Spirit expected him to go to Jerusalem. The prophecy was not that, “If you go you will be bound,” but that “you will be bound.”

Luke himself appears to have been one of the disciples who interpreted the prophetic warnings to Paul as an indication that he should not proceed to Jerusalem at all.

Verses 13-14

This is a tragic passage. Against the advice of his physician, and contrary to the insistence of his friends and fellow-Christians, Paul determined to go to Jerusalem, believing, of course, that it was the will of God for him to go; a conclusion that was reluctantly accepted by Luke and others who sought to dissuade him.

“I am ready . . . to die at Jerusalem . . .” It certainly was not God’s will that Paul should die in Jerusalem, for such did not occur.

Verses 15-16

The point of interest here is the early disciple, Mnason, who would provide the lodging for the company of nine men in Jerusalem; and the fact of his also residing in Caesarea, or at least having gone up there to meet Paul, gives rise to the speculation that he owned houses in both Jerusalem and Caesarea, and perhaps even in Cyprus also.

Mnason was a man of means and of property. Only such a person could have provided lodgings in such a city as Jerusalem for so large a company.

Verses 17-19

“Received us gladly . . . “ This could have been expected, normally, due to the money which Paul brought and presumably delivered at this time to James and the elders; but the situation was far from normal, here being many powerful enemies of Paul in Jerusalem who had sowed the city with false and bitter reports concerning him. In his letter to the Romans, Paul had solicited their prayers that the brethren in Jerusalem would even receive the bounty raised for them among Gentile churches. (Romans 15:31) This first joyful reception was therefore an answer to Paul’s prayers.

“James . . . and all the elders . . .” James, as a natural half-brother of our Lord, and an inspired author (of the book of James), was an “apostle of secondary rank,” though not one of the Twelve; and it was quite natural that the church in Jerusalem should have given him the honor which he seems to enjoy in this and other passages.

Alexander Campbell, *Acts of Apostles*, p. 142 wrote, “This was the fifth time that Paul had visited Jerusalem, since he set out against the brethren at Damascus.” This initial joyful reception seemed to promise that it would be the happiest; but such was not to be.

John Peter Lange, *Commentary on Acts*, p. 389 said, “It can scarcely be supposed that any of the apostles were at that time in Jerusalem.” Otherwise, they would have been mentioned. It could be a matter of conjecture as to where

each of them had gone. They were obedient to the Lord's command to "Go . . . into all the world."

Verses 20-21

In the absence of the Twelve, who presumably might have known better, the whole Jerusalem church was involved in law-keeping, being "zealous for the law of Moses." This very James had already publicly assented with Peter and the Twelve that they would not place upon the Gentiles a "yoke" which neither themselves, nor their fathers could bear; and here James is concerned for circumcision and keeping the "customs." The great error of James, the Jerusalem elders, and the majority of that church was in the supposition that God had two plans, one for Gentiles and another for Jews. This apostolic mandate lifting law-keeping from the back of the Gentiles was also the theoretical and logical lifting of it off the backs off "all Christians;" but this had somehow been overlooked in Jerusalem.

An extenuation of the blame of those Jewish Christians in not being able to accept the abolition of the Mosaic Law and all the temple services is seen in our Lord's prophecy of the temple's destruction. The Lord knew that the hold of its forms and sacrifices would have such a force upon all the Jews, that rather than their being able to tear away from them, God would tear them away from the Jews.

As John Wesley, *op. cit.*, *in loco* said, "James should have told those Jewish Christians: I do not keep the Law of Moses; neither does Peter; neither need any of you!" The charges mentioned here, to the effect that Paul had persuaded Jewish Christians not to circumcise their children, was a base lie. He had even circumcised Timothy with his own hands, and it is evident that Paul carried on no campaign of any kind as that alleged against him. However, in Paul's making circumcision and all Mosaic regulations absolutely unnecessary for salvation, he had laid the theoretical foundation for their total abandonment by all Christians. James' proposal as to what Paul should do about the situation was next offered.

Verses 22-24

It is, of course, that Paul himself, as a Jew, kept many of the customs of Jews, in a patriotic sense, even shaving his head with regard to some kind of vow; but Paul's writings make it certain that he never regarded any such things as being related in any manner whatsoever to salvation in the name of Christ.

Without doubt Paul's observance of such things made his entry into synagogues possible, and thus they had a certain practical utility in his teaching. "To the Jews I became a Jew, so that I might win Jews. (1 Corinthians 9:20)

Still, one is aghast at James' proposal! Was it right for him to make such a proposition to Paul? And was it right for Paul to concur in it? It is believed, of course, that both James and Paul did what, under the circumstances, they truly believed to be right; but evidently both of them were caught in a net of circumstances where anything they might have done would have had elements of error in it.

"Take them and purify yourself along with them . . ." What is indicated here is that James and the Jerusalem elders were proposing that part of the Gentile bounty raised for the "poor saints" would be diverted to the greedy priests in the "den of thieves and robbers," so vehemently condemned by the Christ Himself.

It appears that the absorption into the Jerusalem church of so many Pharisees had created a situation in which a Pharisaical party in the church itself was as busy as beavers grafting as much as possible of the law of Moses onto Christianity; and, although they had not yet gone so far as to insist on Gentiles keeping such things (the apostolic edit stood against it, as in the next verse), nevertheless, it is all too evident that they would soon have gotten around to that, or else have made Gentile Christianity an inferior brand of faith.

Adam Clarke, Commentary on the Whole Bible, Vol. V, p. 860 said, "However we may consider this subject, it is exceedingly difficult to account for the conduct of James and the elders, and of Paul on this occasion. There seems to be something in this transaction which we do not fully understand."

The exact nature of the Nazarite vow, involved in this business, can be of very little interest to Christians. It is enough to know that certain sacrifices to be offered in the temple had to be provided and paid for; and that Paul consented to be “the fall guy.” Some things had to be done by God Himself before men could be righteous; and the denial of Peter the night the Lord was betrayed was due not so much to any unusual weakness in Peter, as to the fact that the enabling death of Christ had not then taken place.

We view the unhappy situation here as beyond the control, either of James and the elders, or of Paul. The mighty undertow against true spirituality in Christ which was provided by the extravagantly beautiful, impressive, and even glorious temple was simply too much for the Jerusalem church, the entire epistle to the Hebrews giving evidence of the same fact; and as the hour God had appointed for its destruction was yet future, the status of the church in Jerusalem continued to be far short of the ideal.

Even kings were “sucked in” by the pressure exerted by that temple crowd in Jerusalem. W. J. Conybeare, *Life and Epistles of Saint Paul*, p. 573 relates that not long before this, “Agrippa I had given the same public expression of his sympathy with the Jews, on his arrival from Rome to take possession of his throne.”

No doubt James and the elders felt that what the king had done of popularity, Paul might do for the sake of peace and harmony; but in such a misunderstanding of the relationship between the Jewish temple and the spiritual body of the Lord, which alone is the true temple. The entire ill-conceived venture was destined for a disastrous failure.

Verse 25

This repetition of the agreement of the so-called council in Jerusalem was made for the sake of assuring Paul that there had been no “backing out” of the agreement; but that it still held. Implicit in James’s proposal, however, was the proposition of two different bodies of Christians being promulgated, one

keeping the law of Moses, the other not—a premise which it is certain that Paul never for one moment accepted.

Verse 26

So far, so good. It might have seemed that all was well, that everything would be alright, that all the Jewish Christians would behold what a noble Jew Paul really was; but Jesus had spoken of that temple, calling it a “den of thieves and robbers,” and accusing its masters of committing murder in the sanctuary itself; and before the week ended the Lord’s church would have new evidence that He had spoken the truth.

It is here that the third journey of Paul ended, with the bounty delivered, and with Paul going the second and third miles in a vain effort to mollify the Judaizers. Paul had traveled some 3,400 miles, suffering countless hardships, and extending himself to the limit of human endurance on behalf of the gospel of Christ. Thus, the fabulous missionary journeys of Paul were concluded.

A period of about eight years was required for all the events connected with those journeys, from about 50 A. D. to about 58 A. D. These journeys established a large number of Gentile congregations throughout a large portion of the Roman Empire and proved the amazing success of the Lord’s great apostle to the Gentile world.

During this period, Galatians 1 and 2, Corinthians 1 and 2, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Romans had been written and sent on their way through history. In a real sense, these eight years were crucial to the spread of Christianity throughout the world.

Verse 27

“The Jews from Asia . . .” These were not Jewish Christians, but were of the hard cadre of secular Israel who rejected Christ totality. Everett F. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 463 believed that one of the reasons for Luke’s inclusion of this incident was to show the final and irrevocable rejection by the Jews of the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, “Luke devotes considerable space to the record of Paul’s last

visit to Jerusalem, not because the visit was important in itself, but because it showed the final rejection of the gospel by Jerusalem.”

That James’ intentions were honorable, and that he in heart had not in any degree forsaken the will of the Lord in his ill-advised request of Paul, which incidentally appears not actually as his request but rather as that of the “elders” (verse 20), is evident in the cause and manner of his death, as recorded by Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, translated by William Whiston, p. 598, “Ananus thought that he had a favorable opportunity because Festus was dead and Albinus was still on the way. So he convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and brought before them a man called James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, and certain others. He accused them of having transgressed the law and delivered them up to be stoned.”

Jack P. Lewis, *Historical Backgrounds of Bible History*, p. 141 wrote, “A Christian writer of the second century, Hegesippus, says James was thrown down from the pinnacle of the temple, stoned, and finally killed by a fuller’s club.” (Note: Jack P. Lewis declares that these testimonies are “usually thought to be authentic.” (Ibid)

Such information further explains the character of the temple crowd which dominated and controlled the Jewish temple.

Verse 28

The unscrupulous agitators who stirred up the mob were false in all of their charges; but a lie serves better than the truth, in the mouths of such evil beasts as those whose fury broke against Paul. In the next verse, Luke gave the pretext upon which they founded the third charge of defiling the temple; but it is of interest only as an example of the way the criminal mind works.

Verse 29

There was no basis at all for supposing that anyone with Paul in the city was also with him in the temple.

Verse 30

The Jerusalem hierarchy had long sought to murder Paul, and his frequenting the temple for a whole week gave them exactly the opportunity they needed; and the only reason they did not succeed was due to the providential alertness and efficiency of the Roman garrison in the Tower of Antonio.

Verse 31

One would like to think that some of those Christians with their heads shaved carried the message to the chiliarch, but there is no evidence of it. The Sanhedrinists, thought their henchmen, were in the process of beating Paul to death, having first precipitated a mob scene in which it would be impossible to fix individual responsibility. Only God's providence saved the great apostle's life.

Verse 32

At the northwest corner of the temple stood the great Tower of Antonio, official headquarters of the Roman presence in Jerusalem. That presence was commanded by a chiliarch (commander of a thousand, or a tenth of a legion) with centurions (each commanding a hundred) under him. Thus it appears that two or three hundred men were used by the chiliarch (called the chief captain in his rescue of Paul).

From the scene here, it is crystal clear that the Jewish temple would have to be destroyed, in order to break up the center of opposition which it sheltered. That opposition was ruthless, unprincipled, and resourceful; and, if they could have continued in possession of such an instrument of power as the temple assuredly was, the gospel might not ever have been fully free of it in Judaea.

However, Paul's speech about to be given would be the last great opportunity that the temple-keepers would ever have to renounce their unbelief and accept the Savior. Only about a decade from the uproar in this chapter would elapse before Vespasian and Titus would unknowingly implement the Lord's great prophecy of the temple's utter ruin.

Verses 33-34

Thus the apostle Paul passed into the custody of the Roman government, beginning a period of imprisonment which was to last five years; and during which Rome itself would become a persecutor. During the long years of his imprisonment, first at Caesarea, then in Rome, Paul would do the research necessary to giving mankind the gospel that bears his name and the book which is the object of these present studies.

Verses 35-36

It was necessary to carry Paul in order to prevent someone's putting a dagger in his heart, even while in the custody of the military. That was no ordinary mob.

“Away with him . . .” They may have supposed that the temple authorities would find some manner of persuading the military to execute Paul. The words remind one of the cries of the mob who clamored for the blood of Jesus.

PAUL'S REQUEST TO SPEAK

Verse 37

Paul requested and received permission to speak to the chiliarch, who was astounded that Paul addressed him in a learned manner, speaking Greek, which the chiliarch had no reason to suppose that he knew. Throughout, the chiliarch had acted upon the assumption that Paul was a criminal, but one word from the apostle was enough to cast doubt on such a conclusion.

Verse 38

“You are not the Egyptian . . . led four thousand men . . .” Flavius Josephus, *op. cit.*, p. 683 wrote, “There were thirty thousand men.” Later, he changed the number to “four thousand men,” (*Ibid.*, p. 596).

Verse 39

“A citizen of no insignificant city . . .” Coins excavated from Tarsus carry the inscription, “Metropolis Autonomous,” indicating that it had been granted autonomy by the Romans. It was an important metropolis noted for its educational facilities, as well as for trade, shipbuilding, and commerce.

The amazing character of Paul is seen in this, that he desired to address a multitude which only a few moments before had been frustrated in their effort to beat him to death. Amazing fortitude, amazing faith, amazing power!

Verse 40

Motioned to the people with his hand . . .” Such a gesture, so characteristic of Paul, might not have been possible unless the chiliarch had ordered the easing or removal of his chains.

“A great hush . . .” How strange that the uproar ceased. The hand of God was surely in the astounding silence that fell over the temple mob. By such a means, God would give them one more opportunity to hear and believe the truth; and one may only wonder if perhaps there were even a single individual who dared in his heart to forsake such blind and frenzied prejudice and come to the fullness of faith in Jesus our Lord.

“The Hebrew dialect . . .” Strictly, this was Aramaic, or the common vernacular of the people. The content of Paul’s speech is the burden of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 22

THE PERIOD OF PAUL’S IMPRISONMENT

In Paul’s address from the steps of Antonio, he spoke to the people till they clamored for his death. The speech deals primarily with Paul’s statement of his background, education, and zeal as a persecutor of Christ, dwelling especially on his record of his conversion. For the first time, he revealed that fact that the

Lord had warned him on his first trip to Jerusalem that the Jews there would “not receive of thee testimony concerning Me.” (verse 18).

Verse 19 is especially significant in that it shows Paul’s unwillingness to receive Jesus’ word as final; because he seemed to be very certain that his own background as one of the opposition would enable him to convert them.

In the above, there appears another parallel in the lives of Peter and Paul.

Peter said, “Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common and unclean” (10:14. In this chapter, Paul said, ”Lord, they themselves know, etc.” (22:19).

A. Paul’s first Defense: from the steps of Antonio

Verses 1-2

“Brethren and fathers . . . “ His audience was Jewish, and thus the title “brethren” was current among the Hebrews and could not therefore, be the “new name” which the mouth of the Lord would give to the followers of Jesus. (See 11:26).

“The Hebrew dialect . . .” Paul addressed them in their Aramaic vernacular. F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, p. 437 said, “Aramaic was not only the vernacular of Palestinian Jews, but was the common speech of all non-Greek speakers in western Asia, as far east as (and including) the Parthian Empire beyond the Euphrates.”

Verse 3

J. R. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, p. 848 gave an excellent outline of Paul’s speech which properly begins with this verse.

Paul was accused of:

- (1) hostility to the Jews,
- (2) contempt for Jewish law, and
- (3) desecration of the temple.

He replied to all three charges thus:

- (1) He was a Jew by birth, educated in Jerusalem under the noted Gamaliel, was zealous for God, and a persecutor of the Christians.
- (2) His conversion resulted from a divine revelation which was confirmed by another divine revelation to Ananias.
- (3) That even after he became a Christian he continued to honor the temple, to worship there, and even saw a vision while worshiping in the temple.

That his preaching to the Gentiles was the result of a Divine command, and was due to the rejection of God's message by the Jews.

“Educated under Gamaliel . . .” The honor in which Gamaliel was held by his contemporaries is demonstrated by the fact that a certain year “was only provisionally known as leap-year until he gave his approval.” (Jack P. Lewis, *Historical Backgrounds of Bible History*, p. 169). As a pupil of so distinguished an educator, Paul hoped to find favor with his hearers.

“Being zealous for God . . .” There is a subtle difference in being zealous for “the law” and being zealous for God; but such a distinction was lost on the temple mob. Strangely enough, it is revealed that “a man may be learned, acquainted with Scripture, and zealous toward God, and yet an enemy and persecutor of Christ.” (John Peter Lange, *Commentary on Acts*, p. 401)

Paul's efforts to identify himself with his hearers were as skillful and diplomatic as was humanly possible; furthermore, they were reinforced by Paul's own convictions that he could succeed. It is important to remember that in spite of God's warning that Israel would not hear him, Paul evidently believed that he could persuade them.

Paul's feeling, despite Divine revelation to the contrary, that he could convert that gang in the temple is pitifully like the opinions of young ministers in every age. They are so sure of the undeniable truth and righteousness of their message that it is simply inconceivable to them that any man could resist it. All of us should take note of how it worked out for Paul. John Wesley, *Notes on the*

New Testament, in loco, said, “It is not easy for a servant of Christ, who is himself deeply impressed with Divine truth, to imagine to what a degree men are capable of hardening their hearts against it. He is often ready to think with Paul that it is impossible for any to resist such evidence. But experience makes him wiser, and shows that willful unbelief is proof against all truth and reason.”

Verses 4-5

“The high priest . . .” It is not known if Paul meant the current high priest Ananias the son of Nedebaeus, who was an unqualified son of the devil, “whose rapacity and greed became a by word,” (F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 449) who had been appointed by a brother of Agrippa I in A. D. 47, and who was finally murdered by the Jews themselves; or if he had reference to Theophilus, “who was high priest at the time of Paul’s journey to Damascus.” (A. C. Hervey, *Pulpit Commentary Vol. 19, Acts ii p. 194*) He was high priest from 37 A. D. to 38 A. D. (W. J. Conybeare, *Life and Epistles of Saint Paul*, p. 586). It is fully possible that both these men were in Paul’s audience at the time of this speech.

ACCOUNT OF PAUL’S CONVERSION

Verse 6

W. J. Conybeare, *Ibid.*, p. 587 said, “In this address to the Jews, Paul kept his conversion out of view for the moment, reserving it till after the vision in the temple is mentioned.”

Note also that whereas Ananias is spoken of as a “Christian” in 9:10, here he is called “a strict and pious Jew.” To be sure, he was both; but Paul chose the designation that would be more readily approved by his audience.

“About noon . . .” John Peter Lange, *op. cit.*, p. 402 expressed it, “Any light which could attract attention at such an hour must indeed be regarded as one out of the common course of nature.”

Verses 7-8

Four questions loom in this speech:

1. Why are You persecuting me? (Verse 7)
2. Who art Thou, Lord? (Verse 8)
3. What shall I do Lord? (Verse 10)
4. Why do You delay? (Verse 16)
 - (1) Persecution of the truth is futile and only aids the persecuted cause by
 - (a) arousing sympathy always felt for the “underdog,”
 - (b) by intensifying the zeal of the persecuted party, and
 - (c) by scattering and multiplying the centers of dissemination of the persecuted truth.
 - (2) This is the most important question a mortal might ask. It is who Jesus is, was and ever is which hails him as God in the hearts of men and demands their allegiance, loyalty, and obedience.
 - (3) What shall I do Lord? Paul here had a conversation with the Lord, plainly asking Him what to do to be saved; but Jesus did not bypass the great commission, nor deny the sufficiency of the word as proclaimed by gospel preachers; He sent Paul to Ananias.
 - (4) Why do you delay? Why should any man delay, or delay his baptism into Christ?

Some delay because they think they are too young, others because they fancy they are too old, some because they suffer from delusion that they do not need to obey; some suppose they are good enough already; others fear they are too wicked to be saved; still others suppose there is plenty of time yet, simply procrastinate, or wait for some mysterious power from above to move them.

“I am Jesus the Nazarene whom you are persecuting . . .” It is important that any man could have invented such a reply. It appears amazing even yet that our

Lord would thus have associated Himself with the wretched village of Nazareth while enthroned at the right hand of the Majesty on high. This is unlike men.

If men had been inventing the New Testament, Jesus would have replied to Paul, “I am the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, dwelling in light unapproachable!” But the Lord said, “I am Jesus of Nazareth!”

Verse 9

“Did not understand the voice . . . “ J. W. McGarvey, Commentary on Acts, ii, p. 216 said, “It is common among all classes of men to say (of a speaker) I did not hear, not meaning they could not hear the sound of the speaker’s voice, but that they could not hear what he said.”

Verses 10-12

This designation of Ananias as a devout, law-keeping, God-fearing Jew was true. He had also become a Christian, but Paul left him out of sight, at the moment, to avoid prejudice against Ananias’ testimony before he could give it.

Verse 13

Paul here recounted the twin miracles of his own super natural blinding, and of the restoration of eyesight by Ananias, another remarkable sign. In this manner Paul was further “qualifying the witness,” looking to the testimony of Ananias he was about to quote.

Verses 14-15

“To know His will . . . “ Here is prophetic testimony that Paul is to be trusted as one who knows God’s will.

“To see the Righteous One . . .” This is testimony of the holiness and perfection of Christ.

A witness for Him to all men . . .” This clearly meant that Paul was commissioned from above to preach the gospel to Gentiles; for are not Gentiles men? Up to here, however, Paul had not spoken the despised word, Gentiles.

Verse 16

Efforts of men to spoil his text with the insinuation that it means, “Be baptized in token of the washing away of thy sins,” (Everett F. Harrison, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, p. 467) are frustrated by the clear and certain meaning of it.

The incomparable B. W. Johnson, *The New Testament Commentary*, p. 516 said, “This clause states the result of baptism in language derived from the nature of the ordinance and has the meaning of “Submit to the rite in order to be forgiven.”

“Arise and be baptized . . .” Vine’s Greek dictionary, as well as many commentators, has given the meaning of this as “Get yourself baptized and your sins washed away.” (E. H. Trenchard, *A New Testament Commentary*, p. 330.)

John Peter Lange *op. cit.*, p. 402 wrote, “We have here a noble testimony to the value which was assigned to holy baptism by the pure apostolic church.”

The present-day conceit that baptism has nothing to do with the forgiveness of sins, that it is merely a token, the so-called outward sign of an inward grace, etc—all such notions are to be rejected in the clear light of the word of God. The above verse would never had been written by the Holy Spirit if any such downgrading of the ordinance of baptism is valid.

E. H. Plumptre, *Elliott’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 152 said, “These words (verse 22) show that for the apostle baptism was no formal or ceremonial act (only), but was joined with repentance and faith, being presupposed, and brought with it the assurance of a real forgiveness.”

Nothing is more clearly taught in the New Testament than the fact of baptism being “unto the remission of sins,” and that it is not to be despised as in any manner unessential, optional, or discretionary for those who truly wish to be saved.

“Calling on His name . . . “ This is not praying for salvation in the ordinary sense, although of course, prayers for salvation must accompany all acts of worship and obedience to God. Some see this text as J. W. Conybeare, *op. cit.*, p. 567 said, “It is a reference o the confession of faith in Jesus which preceded baptism.”

Verses 17-21

Everett F. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 467 gave a brief analysis of these verses, “Here Paul tells that he had left Jerusalem in response to a word from the Lord. While he was praying in the temple as a faithful Jew, God had warned him in a trance that Jerusalem would not receive his message and that therefore he should get quickly out of Jerusalem. Paul protested (even to the Lord) that the Jews’ knowledge of his earlier zeal and sincerity in persecuting the Christians would convince them of the reality of his conversion. The Lord replied that he should leave Jerusalem for he would to sent far away unto the Gentiles.”

In the light of this, there must remain a question of whether or not Paul was completely obedient to the Lord when, contrary to advice of many friends, nevertheless insisted on going there.

Paul’s mention of the temple here, and his praying there, even having the vision there,—all this shows that, at the time, Paul did not understand that the temple itself had been designated by Jesus as “The House Desolate,” that it was truly a den of thieves and robbers, that the glory of it was of the past tense only, that is the day of grace was even at that very time expiring, and that the last word from God that was ever uttered there was this command for Paul to get quickly out of the place. However, Paul’s love of his Jewish brethren was such that he even dared, in a sense, to go against the word of the Lord in an effort to reach them. Before his dealings with the temple Jews were over, however, it may be assumed that Paul got the message fully.

In the light of the above, it is likewise clear that the custom of the earliest Christians of going regularly to the temple for prayer was not something that God desired that they should do, but rather something which He allowed, as

being founded in their natural inclinations, a habit they could not quickly shake off.

“The Gentiles . . .” With this word from Paul, the riot broke out again. It was an evil and unreasonable as all riots, and only the protection of the soldiers prevented their murder of the apostle on the spot.

Verse 22

W. R. Walker, *Studies in Acts*, ii, p. 70 wrote, “The despised word ‘Gentiles’ was a red flag to those wild, savage bulls of hate.” Such wild and bitter cries revealed a carnal lust for Paul’s blood. Here was a shout “for his immediate execution without the formality of a trial.” (E. H. Plumptre, *op. cit.*, p. 152)

Verse 23

“Throwing off their cloaks . . .” With Adam Clark, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol. V, p. 886, we view this as evidence that, “Some of them were actually throwing off their clothes, in order to prepare to stone Paul.” One wonders if Paul remembered what was done to Stephen, and that now his own life would have been snuffed out on the very spot where they mobbed Stephen, except for the province of God. Some of Paul’s old buddies no doubt, were in the business of keeping the clothes of the executioners, just as he himself had done when Stephen died.

“Throwing dust into the air. . .” This was pure bestiality, characteristic of a sadistic, uncontrollable mob.

One can only imagine the perplexity and concern of Claudius Lysias, the chief captain. Twice in one day, there had been an awesome disturbance in the very shadow of Antonio; and Paul was the center of both disturbances. He determined to get to the bottom of it.

Verse 24

This affords a glimpse of the brutal culture in which a “confession” was tortured out of any hapless wretch who happened to be accused or the center of any disturbance.

Brooks Foss Westcott, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, p. 268 informs us, “Recent investigations at Jerusalem have disclosed what may have been the scene of the punishment (of Jesus). It is a subterranean chamber, discovered by Captain Warren, on what Mr. Ferguson held to be the site of Antonio—Pilate’s Praetorium—“stands a truncated column, no part of the construction, for the chamber is vaulted above the pillar, but just such a pillar as criminals would be tied to be scourged. It cannot be later than the time of Herod.”

If Westcott is correct, then this is the same pillar where Paul was bound; and there is something moving in the thought that here the great apostle was bound to the very device upon which our Lord so shamefully suffered.

Verse 25

“Stretched him out with thongs . . .” This was a different kind of binding from that of “chains” that bound Paul earlier. This was a formal stretching of his body on the pillar preparatory to beating him half to death; and the very initiation of such an act was contrary to Roman law, for a citizen of Rome might not be either bound in such a manner or scourged.

“Is it lawful . . .” Of course it was not lawful; and Paul’s appeal in this instance to his Roman citizenship was all that was needed to abort the savage punishment he was about to endure. The centurion; true to his duty, at once revealed the situation to the chiliarch.

Verse 26

“For this man is a Roman . . .” This was shocking news to Claudius Lysias, for he was already guilty of illegally binding Paul; and the penalties that Rome

inflicted for violations in this sector were drastic. He at once made a personal trip to the scene of the intended scourging.

Verse 27

Paul's word was all that was required, for it was a capital offense to lead Roman citizenship if it was not true; and, therefore, Lysias did not need any documentation; which, if he had required it, would no doubt have been available in the public records of Tarsus.

Verse 28

“With a large sum of money . . .” J. R. Dummelow, *op. cit.*, p. 848 said, “It is evident that the chief captain had not bought his citizenship under Claudius (41-54 A. D.), who sold it for a merely nominal sum.” This fact has an affirmative bearing on the early date of events in this chapter, for Claudius Lysias had received his citizenship at a time prior to Claudius.

“But I was actually born a citizen . . .” From this, it appears that Paul's father had been awarded Roman citizenship, or that even his grandfather had received it, by what means we are totally unaware; however, the most reasonable guess is that it came about from some signal and outstanding service to the emperor.

Verse 29

J. W. Conybeare, *op. cit.*, p. 589 said, “Lysias knew full well no man would dare to assume citizenship if it did not truly belong to him . . . and orders were instantly given for the removal of the instrument of torture.”

Still, the binding itself was forbidden for a citizen; and the fact of Paul's being freeborn raised the question of his having friends at Rome; and from such considerations Lysias himself was afraid.

Verse 30

The council here was the Sanhedrin, the same evil court that had judicially murdered the Son of God; and one is struck by the position of Lysais being so much like that of Pontius Pilate. As a matter of fact, it will be remembered that Pilate's residence, like that of Felix, was actually at Caesarea. Normally, the affairs in Jerusalem were handled by the head of the Roman garrison in Antonio.

On this occasion, the bloodthirsty Sanhedrin would not be able to intimidate or frighten the chiliarch into doing their will; therefore, they were compelled against their wishes to submit to Paul being transferred beyond the reach of their hatred. The events leading up to that development are related in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 23

The period of Paul's imprisonment began with his arrest and rescue by Claudius Lysias, as recorded in the last chapter; and here we have the second of five pleas which Paul made in the various situations developing from his being a prisoner. This imprisonment was to last till the conclusion of Acts.

B. Paul's Second Defense: His Plea Before the Sanhedrin

Verses 1-2

"The council . . ." This was the historic court of the Hebrews called the Sanhedrin, including perhaps some of the very men who had condemned Jesus to death. Don De Welt, *Acts Made Actual*, p. 295 said, "They no longer met in the famous hall called the Lishcath Haggazzith," in the sacred area where no Gentile might have gone, but in a more public place, as indicated by the soldiers having access to it a bit later.

"Perfectly good conscience before God . . ." Paul repeatedly affirmed that he had always maintained a good conscience in the sight of God (1 Corinthians 4:4), even declaring that "from his forefathers" he had worshiped God with a pure conscience (2 Timothy 1:3) W. R. Walker, *Studies in Acts ii*, p. 72 said that,

“This is an unanswerable argument against the oft-repeated theory” that all religious actions are right, just as long as one is sincere in what he does.”

Conscience is important to every man; but the value of conscience as a guide is determined by the kind of teaching upon which it is founded. Jesus Himself told the Twelve in John 16:2 that, “An hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering a service to God.”

Ananias, the high priest, ordered Paul to be struck in the mouth, but this was an arrogant and illegal display of prejudice and unscrupulous hatred toward Paul. The order was probably obeyed the instant it was given. F. F. Bruce said, “He was one of the most disgusting profaners of the sacred office of the high priest.”

A. C. Hervey, Pulpit Commentary, Acts, ii, p. 211 questioned whether or not Ananias was actually high priest at this time, because, “Josephus speaks of a Jonathon who was high priest during the government of Felix.”

Jack P. Lewis, Historical Backgrounds of Bible History, p. 169 pointed out, the New Testament usage of “high priest” has three meanings:

- (1) the man in office,
- (2) one who had previously held it and,
- (3) a member of the privileged family from whom the high priests were chosen.

F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 449 wrote, “This Ananias was a son of Nedebaeus and had acquired the office from Chalcis a brother of Herod Agrippa I, in 47 A. D. and (probably with some interruptions) till 59 A.D.” He was an appropriate successor to those who murdered the Lord.

Regarding the council meeting in which this defense of Paul occurred, it may not be thought of as any formal gathering of the Sanhedrin with the high priest in charge. Lysias was in charge of the meeting. Sir William M. Ramsey, *Pictures of the Apostolic Church*, p. 280 said, “This meeting was convoked by a Roman

military officer, and was not a formal assembly presided over by a high priest in official dress.”

Note: Any or all of the circumstances noted above may have accounted for Paul’s failure to recognize Ananias as high priest.

Verses 3-4

“God is going to strike you . . . “ This was doubtless a prophecy put in Paul’s mouth by the Lord; for it is a fact that not many years later the reprobate Ananias was murdered by his own people at the time of the beginning of the Jewish war.

“In violation of the Law . . . ” It was illegal to smite a man who had not been condemned; and, as yet, Paul had not been tried.

Do you revile God’s high priest . . . ?” It was illegal to revile an authority such as the high priest; but the Sanhedrinists were much quicker to defend that law than they were to honor the law forbidding striking a man illegally.

Verse 5

“I was not aware . . . “ There is no reason whatever to accuse Paul of blindness (or near-sightedness). For reasons cited under verse 4, the view here is that Paul simply spoke the truth and that he did not know the high priest by his personal appearance, although he might indeed have known his name.

Paul’s understandable outrage and impromptu, protest, in all probability inspired, had two very important results:

- (1) it prophesied the destruction of Ananias, and
- (2) it led Paul to see at once that there was not any possibility of justice for himself in such a tribunal. W. J. Conybeare, *Life and Epistles of Saint Paul*, p. 591 said, “There was no prospect before this tribunal of a fair inquiry and a just decision.” This accounts for the strategy Paul immediately employed in his defense.

Verse 6

There was no fault whatever on the part of Paul in setting those mad-dogs at each other's throats instead of his own. He well knew the schismatic condition of the Sanhedrin and very wisely took advantage of it in order to save his own life.

“Hope and of resurrection of the dead . . .” The so-called “moral problem” comes here. Was it strictly true that Paul had been brought before them because of his teaching on the doctrine of the resurrection? Well, of course it was. Alexander Campbell, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 155 noted, “The literal resurrection of the dead, in the person of the Son of Mary and the Son of God, was the omnipotent argument, wielded with irresistible power by the eyewitnesses of the fact, against Sadduceeism and every form of materialism and infidelity, which any form of philosophy, falsely so-called, has ever obtruded upon mankind.”

That Paul on this occasion elected to state the fundamental precept of Christianity in such a manner as to divide his foes was a stroke of genius and should be praised and appreciated.

Verses 7-9

Paul's identification of himself as a Pharisee is also offensive to some people; but it should be remembered that the “noble Pharisee” must never be identified with the Pharisee's whom Jesus denounced.

Many priests became Christians (6:7), most of whom were doubtless Pharisees; and it is very likely that much of Luke's gospel (9:51-19:28) was researched through Luke's interviews with such Pharisees (then Christians) while Paul suffered two whole years incarcerated in Caesarea. The true and righteous Pharisees, of whom Paul must be reckoned, obeyed the gospel.

Paul's words in this passage have the effect of saying, “Only such as I am are the true Pharisees.”

Verse 10

“Great dissension . . .” This was the third riot in two days! And, at that time, the chief captain was still totally ignorant of any cause for such disturbances. Lysias had saved Paul’s life in each of the three riots, and would be called upon to save it a fourth time the next day. Don De Welt, *op. cit.*, p. 297 said, “He must have been confused and disgusted. What kind of people were these Jews? He could make no sense out of their words and actions.”

The disciples at Tyre interpreted the words of the Holy Spirit as a directive for Paul “not to set foot in Jerusalem” (21:4); and Luke agreed with them. Paul did not so interpret the words of the Spirit but went on to Jerusalem.

There must have been some dreadful feelings of uncertainty, disappointments and grief in Paul’s heart, and emotions of fear that perhaps, after all, he had been wrong about this trip to Jerusalem. Then there came the glorious reassurance from the Lord Himself.

Verse 11

Christ Himself comforted and strengthened His apostle. E. H. Trenchard, *A New Testament Commentary*, p. 331 wrote, “There was not a whisper of reproach but:

- (a) encouragement from the Lord of all comfort,
- (b) the ratification of the witness in Jerusalem, despite all the turbulence;
and
- (c) confirmation of the purpose that Paul should witness in Rome.”

Our Lord’s specific assurance that Paul should go to Rome would indicate that Paul’s mind had been deeply troubled by events which he might have thought were the end of any hopes he had of going to Rome. The very fact of Jesus’ appearance to Paul in this context speaks of the absolute necessity of it.

Verses 12-15

The Lord had called the temple a den of thieves and robbers; and here is the most amazing proof of it.

“More than forty . . .” How many more? Well, to the forty, one must add the chief priests and the elders of the people, the entire dominant factor which controlled the temple itself. How evil this once glorious institution had become! Once the moral nature of man is decapitated at the highest level, the consequent descent to lower and lower levels of shame, carnality and depravity is inevitable and accelerated.

The whole temple party had already conceded to themselves that any fair hearing of Paul’s case before Lysias would result in his acquittal.

“Bound . . . under an oath . . .” F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 457 gave the form of such an oath thus, “So may God do to us and more also, if we eat or drink until we have killed Paul.” The spirit of Jezebel rested upon the temple fathers, for she made a similar vow: “So let the gods do to me and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time” (1 Kings 19:2).

“Conspiracy . . .” This word occurs “only here in the New Testament.” Matthew Henry, *Henry-Scott Commentary*, p. 523 wrote, “Amazingly, they knew that many of the chief priests and elders would favor the murderous designs,” indicating that the satanic behavior in the temple was known to many and recognized as typical of their operations. The plot to kill Paul was skillfully designed and would in all probability have succeeded if it had not been providentially frustrated. The high priest would request of Lysias another hearing, promising, of course, that no riot would ensue next time, and pretending of course that they would fully resolve the matter at another hearing; and there was no reason to suppose Lysias might not have honored such a request.

In the meanwhile, forty desperate men, armed with daggers, would waylay the escort as they started for the meeting place and murder Paul before he ever

appeared before the Sanhedrin, which of course would have professed surprise and avoided all implications involving themselves. Beautiful! But God did not allow it.

Verse 16

“The son of Paul’s sister heard . . .” This is all that is known of this “young man.” It seems proper, however, to receive the deduction of W. J. Conybeare, *op. cit.*, p. 594 to the effect that, “The whole narrative gives the impression that he was a very young man.” This is justified by the commander’s taking him “by the hand” (verse 19).

It would be interesting to know just how this lad learned so much about the conspiracy, and if his mother was a Christian, and why, if they were living in Jerusalem, Paul would have been staying with Mnason instead of his sister, etc.

Verse 17

Paul did not trust the centurion with the message, but rather contrived to get it delivered to the chief captain himself.

Verse 18

“This young man . . .” The same word is used of Paul, as “the young man . . .” at whose feet the clothes of Stephen were laid.

“Paul the prisoner . . .” Alas, this was to be the status of Paul for half a decade.

Verse 19

The care with which Lysias protected himself against any possible eavesdropping is notable. And his caution was well rewarded; for after receiving the tip-off on what was afoot, he could move without the temple conspirators’ knowledge that he had intentionally acted to thwart their murder of an innocent man.

Verses 20-21

The full and concise manner of “the young man’s report suggests that he was at least of sufficient age to grasp all the details of the plot, indicating also the exercise of a rather subtle diplomacy. Whereas the plotters proposed that the council should have Paul brought down, in order that “they” (the council) might further examine him, the young man’s report of it gave the right of inquiry to the council, now they are waiting for the promise from you.

Verse 22

Thus protecting himself against any premature knowledge of what he might do, the commander acted with decisive speed and authority to checkmate the evil conspirators.

Verses 23-24

The whole force was 470 men; and their departure at the third hour of the night (9:00 P.M.) was thus well ahead of any request the chief priests might send to him the next day; and the size of the escort was large enough to kill any thought of the forty conspirators of following it, overtaking it, and murdering Paul anyway. This abruptly aborted their plot.

“Provide mounts . . . “ This has been variously understood as the need of several mounts for Paul, which would be changed from time to time on such a forced march; or as including mounts for the soldiers guarding Paul, and to whom he was still presumably chained; or as including sufficient mounts for Luke and other companions of Paul. The text affords no way of knowing exactly what all might have been included.

“Felix the governor . . .” This was the procurator of Judea, one of the successors of Pontius Pilate, although the office itself, for a time, had disappeared under the rule of Herod Antipas I, who was king over the whole area once ruled by Herod the Great; and, of course, during his reign no procurators were needed. However, Herod was summarily slain by an angel of God (12:23) in 44 A.D.; and after that, the old system of procurators was revived.

FELIX

Felix Marcus Antonius, a brother of Pallas, the notorious favorite of Claudius, through influence at Rome, was named procurator of Judaea about 52 A.D. , an office held until recalled by Nero in 59 A.D. He was succeeded by Festus.

The events being described by Luke in this chapter occurred two years before the recall of Felix, that is, in 57 A.D. (The New Bible Dictionary, p. 421) (This favors a 55 A.D. date for Romans.)

Felix, trading on his influence in Rome, was an unscrupulous scoundrel. Paul was innocent, and should have been released at once; but Felix hoped to get a fat bribe, and kept Paul in prison. He put down certain brigands and robbers, “but he himself was worse than any of them.” (ISBE, Vol. II, p. 1105) A. C. Hervey, *op. cit.*, p. 211, tells how he “murdered Jonathan the high priest, using the Assassins,” one of the “high priests” who held office during the term of Ananias, whose high priesthood was interrupted.

Verses 25-26

Here is revealed the name of the chief captain. The coincidence of his being calling “Claudius” at a time when Claudius was emperor might have resulted from Lysias’ mere annexation of the name “as a compliment to the emperor, such liberties being then common.” (W. R. Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 849)

In addition to what is said above, Felix’ importance is further seen in the fact that his outrageous and unprincipled conduct did much to precipitate the war in 70 A.D. which led to the ruin of Israel. J.R. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, p. 849 said, “His folly and cruelty goaded the nation into disaffection and rebellion.”

LYSIAS’ LETTER

Verses 27-30

This is a classical example of a self-serving distortion of truth to serve selfish and political ends. “Having learned that he was a Roman . . .” implies that the

rescue was made to prevent harm to a Roman citizen, whereas Lysias did not even know that he was a Roman till he had illegally bound him, a fact left comfortably out of sight in his letter!

Paul is sent to Felix, not as a criminal, but as a fellow citizen rescued. If an honorable man had held the office then entrusted to Felix, Paul would have been released at once.

Verses 31-33

Antipatris, 26 miles south of Caesarea, was rebuilt by Herod the Great in honor of his father Antipater. “Brought him by night to Antipatrus . . .” means one of two things:

- (1) Paul and his escort of 470 men made a forced march in order to arrive at Antipatris the same night they left Jerusalem, or
- (2) that they stopped on route arriving at Antipatris the next night.

“Had come to Caesarea . . .” H. Leo Boles, *op. cit.*, p. 375 appropriately observed that, “They entered Caesarea in daylight, and such a parade would have attracted many curious eyes. Philip and other Christians of Caesarea must have been startled to recognize the rapid fulfillment of prophecy concerning Paul’s journey to Jerusalem.”

Verses 34-35

“From what province . . .” This was a pertinent question to determine if Paul really came under his authority; finding he had no worry on that point, he postponed any action until he could devise some manner of turning the situation to his own profit.

“In Herod’s Praetorium (palace) . . .” Vicious criminals would not have been kept in such a palace, and therefore it may be inferred that Paul was honorably treated and given the best accommodations available for a man under detention. This was to be Paul’s home for two whole years, during which Luke would

canvass the cities and villages of Galilee, Judaea, Samaria, etc, preparatory to writing the Gospel of Luke.

For the benign character of Paul's imprisonment in Herod's palace, however, one may be grateful and thankful to the Lord.

CHAPTER 24

The third of five defenses which marked the early part of Paul's period of imprisonment is given in this chapter. Events of this chapter (except the last paragraph occurred only twelve days from the time Paul entered Jerusalem from Caesarea (21:17).

C. Paul's Third Defense: The Speech Before Felix

Verses 1-2a

“And after five days . . .” H. Leo Boles, *Commentary on Acts*, p. 377, very properly says that this may mean “either five days from Paul's departure from Jerusalem, or five days after his arrival in Caesarea.”

“A certain attorney named Tertullus . . .” Having been foiled as a mob, and their forty conspirators having been left holding the bag, the high priest and company now tried another approach. Sir William M. Ramsay, *Pictures of the Apostolic Church*, p. 288 wrote, “Cunning, assassination and conspiracy having failed, they tried the tinsel of oratory, attempting to gain their desire by flattery.”

Verses 2b-3

Don De Welt, *Acts Made Actual*, p. 303 said, “Tertullus, was doing his mercenary best!” Some of the “evils” which Felix had corrected were well known. For example, his defeat of the Egyptian false prophet (21:38). Tertullus did not mention the murder of Jonathan the high priest. But, of course, R. Tuck, *Pulpit Commentary Vol. 18, Acts ii*, p.245 says, “If a man lacks arguments, he will flatter the judge.” John Wesley, *New Testament Commentary*, in loco said, “Felix was a man of the most infamous character, and a plague to all the provinces over which he presided.”

Verse 4

“To grant us . . .” In this, Tertullus, in good legal style, associates himself with his clients, continuing to use the first person plural pronoun throughout.

“By your kindness, a brief hearing . . .” Felix would indeed bestow kindness, not upon the accusers, but upon Paul in the mild manner of his imprisonment.

“That I may not weary you . . .” E. H. Plumptre, *op. cit.*, p. 150 said, “He speaks as if obligated to restrain himself from the further panegyrics (praising) which his feelings would naturally prompt.”

Verses 5-8

Briefly stated, Paul was accused of being:

- (1) a pest,
- (2) and insurrectionist,
- (3) a ringleader of the Nazarenes, and
- (4) one who had attempted to profane the temple.

All these charges except number 3 were unspecific, and even it was unsupported by any evidence whatever. Sir William M. Ramsay, *op. cit.*, p. 290 said, “The weak part of Tertullus’ case was that he produced no evidence to support his charges.”

“The sect of the Nazarenes . . .” F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, p. 465 said, “This is the only place in the New Testament where this term is used of the followers of Jesus.” In no sense whatever is Christianity “a sect.”

“To desecrate the temple. . .” Note how this is changed from “defiled the temple,” as at first alleged (21:28).

“By examining him yourself . . .” Agreement is felt with J. W. McGarvey, *Commentary on Acts*, ii, p. 235 who construed this as a hint of examination by

scourging.” As indicated by their careful avoidance of giving any information regarding Paul’s Roman citizenship, not knowing, of course, that Lysias had already informed the governor on that point.

Note: The resolution of the question, however, would have to turn finally on the verses left out of our text, appearing in the margin of the New American Standard Bible. The words left out are verses 6b-8a: “And we wanted to judge him according to our own law. But Lysias the commander came along, and with much violence took him out of our hands, ordering his accusers to come before you.”

Verse 9

The very presence of the high priest with a group of prominent elders from Jerusalem, arrayed on the plaintiff’s side of the court would ipso facto be their “affirming” the charges.

Evidently the high priest Ananias and the group were counting on the social prominence of the plaintiffs to sway the governor, for they brought no witnesses! Perhaps they considered themselves successors to the witnesses; but events proved that not even the pagan court of Felix would tolerate any such thing as a “successor” to witnesses.

Verse 10

Here Paul was abruptly asked to defend himself without any prior knowledge of the charges, except as he might have surmised what they would be; and the eloquent and convincing manner in which he devastated the plaintiffs’ case must be understood as a fulfillment of Jesus’ promise that, “I will give you utterance and wisdom, which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute.” (Luke 21:15)

“For many years you have been a judge . . .” Felix’s career had included other assignments prior to his becoming procurator, and Paul by these words took a sweeping view of it all.

W. J. Conybeare, *Life and Epistles of Saint Paul*, p. 610 said, "If these events took place in 58 A.D., Felix had been governor six years." However, those who accuse Paul of exaggeration overlook the fact that Tacitus expressly states that Felix "was joint procurator with Cumanus, and therefore a judge to the Jewish nation long before the banishment of Cumanus," (A. C. Hervey, *Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 18, Acts ii, p. 232) and long before Felix himself became procurator sole.

Note Paul's use of "judge" rather than "procurator, or governor."

Verse 11

"You can take note . . ." By such a remark, Paul said in effect that, "You are far too intelligent to be taken in by the unsubstantiated charges and wild allegations of the plaintiffs."

The only allegation made against Paul that would have been of any interest whatever to the governor, was the insinuation that he was an "insurrectionist." It was to that point which Paul immediately replied, proving by a single statement that it was a false charge, saying, "It was not more than twelve days since I went up . . ."

- (1) No insurrection was ever perpetrated in twelve days.
- (2) Paul was there to worship, and even paid the charges for certain men who had vows.

He was in the temple when Lysis rescued him from the mob who wanted to cast him out of the temple; and if Paul was causing an insurrection, the center of it would have had to be in the temple. Furthermore, Felix well knew, as did Pilate, that if Paul had been trying to stir up an insurrection, the temple Jews would have supported it. The charge, therefore, was a flimsy unsupported lie.

Scholars have busied themselves endlessly, counting up the twelve days Paul mentioned. Sir William M. Ramsay, *op. cit.*, p. 288, gives us a calculation of those days and it is one of the most readable.

It is as follows:

1. Reception by James and the elders; first day of purification.
- 2-4. Second, third, and fourth day of purification.
5. Fifth day of purification; riot; Paul's speech on the steps of Antonio.
6. Meeting the council (Paul's dream that night).
7. Plot to slay Paul arranged.
8. He starts to Caesarea before midnight, reaches Antipatris before dawn: Ananias learns of Paul's departure: first of the five days (4:1).
9. Paul is handed over to Procurator Felix in Caesarea; second day.
- 10-11. Paul in Caesarea: third and fourth days.
12. Fifth day (24:1): arrival of Ananias and Tertullus in Caesarea: Paul denounced and the investigation began. (This is also the twelfth day of verse 11.)

Verse 12

Paul's emphasis here is still directed to the charge of creating an insurrection, the only thing Felix would have been the slightest concerned about. Paul's time in Jerusalem had been spent almost entirely in the temple, not in synagogues or the city. What went on in the temple was controlled by the plaintiffs; and their casting Paul out and trying to murder him proved that no seditious activity had occurred.

This blew their case right out of the water. Paul had been in Jerusalem only twelve days, and five of them had been spent in Caesarea.

An insurrection against Rome in less than a week, Impossible! Paul put the final torpedo in their charges with this next sentence.

Verse 13

With this blast, Paul clinched his defense against the only charge that might have seemed important to the governor. He then moved to refute the others.

Verse 14

“The way which they call a sect . . .” The “way” as a designation of Christianity occurs frequently in Acts. Implicit in such a name is the trueness and rightness of it. There are many ways of sin, but only one way of eternal life.

“Sect . . .” J. R. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 849 said, “Tertullus applied this name to the Christians in a bad sense” but, “Christianity was never a sect,” is not a sect today; and Paul did not here refer to it as a “sect.” (H. Leo Boles *op. cit.*, p. 382)

God shall finally sum up all things in Christ. Therefore, the wholeness is in Him. The family in heaven and upon earth compose the one perfect entity of the body of Christ; and any thought of that precious and eternal spiritual body as, in any sense, a “sect” is a denial of sacred truth.

“The God of our fathers . . .” W. J. Conybeare, *op. cit.*, p. 608 observed that Paul’s use of this expression, having the meaning of “our hereditary God,” had the design of establishing the legality of Christianity under Roman law. “Thus Paul asserts that, according to Roman law which allowed all men to worship the gods of their own nation, he is not open to any charge of irreligion.”

This thought is further reinforced by Paul’s declaration that Christianity is the way of worshiping which is in all things according to the law of Moses and the writings of the holy prophets. Throughout all of Paul’s epistles, as here, Paul never failed to present Christianity as fully identified with all types and shadows of the Old Testament, being in fact the fulfillment of all that was intended by everything in the old institution. Christians are the true Israel. Christ is the Prophet like unto Moses. Christ’s teaching is the New Covenant. And, yet the New is identified with the Old.

Verse 15

Both this verse and the following are further elaborations of the truth that Christianity is not some wild and irresponsible new religion. Its roots reach back to Eden and include all of the vital hopes which humanity ever had, such as

the resurrection mentioned here. What was so clear to Paul was that Christianity is the fulfillment of Judaism, a fact to which the ancient leaders of Israel were totally blind.

Verse 16

Paul repeatedly insisted, not merely as reported in Acts, but in his epistles as well, that he had done his best throughout life to live conscientiously toward God and men always. That he did, in fact, commit many sins does not deny this; for conscience is not an infallible guide. The conscience must be taught and regulated by the word of God before it can be a safe monitor of human behavior.

Verses 17-18a

“Now after several years . . .” H. Leo Boles, *op. cit.*, p. 383 said, “If Paul went up to Jerusalem (18:22), which it seems he did, this was some five years ago.”

“Alms to my nation . . .” This shows that Paul’s journey to Jerusalem was for the purpose of bringing alms to the poor of that city, and Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament, Acts*, p. 334 that city said, “Thus it was no part of his purpose to interfere with or profane the worship of the temple.”

Everett F. Harrison, *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 174 said, “Here is the one clear reference in Acts to the purpose of Paul’s visit to Jerusalem, which occupies so large a place in his epistles.”

He had canvassed the Gentile churches extensively, collecting money to be distributed to the poor Christians in Jerusalem; and as they were of Jewish background, it was not an error to state that the alms had been brought to Paul’s “nation.”

“They found me occupied in the temple . . .” This was easily proved, and none of the opposition denied it; hence the conclusion was mandatory that Paul had in no way profaned the temple. Rather, they had profaned it by their mob action against Paul, and by their murderous conspiracy within the temple itself.

Verses 18b-19

The failure of any of those Asian Jews to appear proved their unwillingness to testify against Paul; and, as they were the ones who first initiated the charge of profaning the temple, it left Ananias and the other litigants pressing a charge made by others, and of which they were in no sense witnesses.

Paul's plea here has the effect of saying, "Where are those who say they saw me profaning the temple?" The mention of the Asian Jews imposed upon the plaintiffs the necessity, of producing the witnesses, or withdrawing, the charges. The whole trumped-up affair was, by this time, appearing to the governor as fraudulent and irresponsible. Felix could undoubtedly see through the whole thing. W. R. Walker, *Studies in Acts*, ii, p. 81 said, "The Jews pretending loyalty to Caesar, desired Paul condemned as a traitor to Caesar, whereas their real motive was to have him silenced as a gospel preacher."

Verses 20-21

This brought their whole case crashing to the ground. They had already tried Paul before the Sanhedrin, and there had been no guilty verdict. Instead the Sanhedrin broke up the meeting fighting among themselves! So Paul put his forefinger into the very sore spot when he asked them to explain to the governor what they found out when they had already tried him!

"Other than for this one statement . . ." This must be understood as the tiniest admission of any wrong on Paul's part. Adam Clarke, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol. V. p. 876 paraphrased it like this, "Of course, in the eyes of these Sadducean priests, they consider me to have done wrong in advocating a resurrection of the dead. "But as this doctrine is credited by the nation in general, and is not criminal, they can bring no accusation against me with reference to anything else." Paul here implied that his belief in the resurrection was the true basis of their hatred of him.

J. W. McGarvey, *op. cit.*, p. 237 also noted that, "Paul made this last reference, not because he was conscious of any wrong in the matter, but in order to taunt

his Sadducean accusers, and to show Felix that they were moved against him by party jealousy.”

Paul’s challenge for the high priest to tell what happened at that trial they had already completed administered the coup de grace to the hopes of the Jews that they might force an unfavorable verdict from Felix. Orrin Root, *Acts*, p. 182 wrote, “The high priest wanted no talk about their council meeting that had degenerated into a riot.” This was the summary end of the trial, except for the announcement of the verdict.

Verse 22

The charges had been proved false, Paul’s innocence established, and the governor was fully convinced on both points; but he did not act in a manner consistent with the facts and his own responsibility, proving, as W.R. Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 79 said, “That the best methods of court procedure are of less consequence than the right kind of judges.”

“When Lysias the commander comes down . . .” This was only a delaying tactic. Don De Welt, *op. cit.*, p. 306 said, “He was a long time coming; for Paul stayed two years in Caesarea.” The governor’s fertile brain was already working on that bribe which he anticipated might be extorted from Christians to procure an innocent man’s release.

“Having a more exact knowledge about the Way . . .” It should be remembered that Caesarea was the place where a prominent centurion, Cornelius, had been converted, where Philip the evangelist and his four daughters lived, and where there were doubtless many influential Christians.

Felix doubtless knew many of this, hence it is not unreasonable at all that he should have had a great deal of information about the Christians.

Verse 23

“The centurion . . .” The use of the definite article here has led some to suppose that this was the same centurion sent by Lysias; but E. H. Plumptre, *op.*

cit., p. 161 affirmed that it might be either he “or the one who had special charge of the prisoners waiting for trial.”

The favorable impression made by Paul on Felix is seen in the unusually lenient treatment accorded the prisoner. As H. Leo Boles, *op. cit.*, p. 386 said, “However, the indulgence did not include removal of the chains.”

Don De Welt, *op. cit.*, p. 307 quoting Jacobus, noted that, “He seems to have been in what was called ‘military custody,’ in which the prisoner was bound by a long light chain to his arm, the other end of which was fastened to the officer.”

“Ministering to him . . .” as used here, “is a common medical term for the cessation or remission of pain or disease,” (A. C. Hervey, *op. cit.*, p. 233), thus inadvertently showing the hand of the learned doctor of medicine, the sacred evangelist Luke.

Verse 24

The character of Felix was noted under 23:24; and some further attention is due to the woman who sat beside him as his wife.

DRUSILLA

Drusilla was a sensuously beautiful person, one of the ten descendants of Herod the Great whose names appear in the New Testament, and, like all the Herods, possessed a character marked by selfishness and profligacy. She was the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I; and at this time (57 or 58 A.D.), she was not yet twenty years old. Her brother Agrippa I, gave her in marriage to the king of Emesa when she was only fourteen or fifteen years of age.

The young queen was only sixteen when Felix, with the help of Atomos, a Cypriot magician, persuaded her to leave her husband and marry him. She was Felix’s third wife, and they had a son named Agrippa. (F .F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 472)

A. C. Hervey, *op. cit.*, p. 233 wrote, “After the recall of Felix, Drusilla and her only son by him perished in the eruption of Vesuvius. Jack P. Lewis, *Historical*

Backgrounds of Bible History, p. 164 said, “She was one of the three royal wives taken by Felix.

Verse 25

Such subjects as Paul discussed with Felix were calculated to inspire terror in any man who fully comprehends their meaning.

‘Righteousness . . .’ God is righteous and the imperishable enemy of all wickedness. The entire book of Romans is given over to a discussion of this theme; and what is indicted here is but a summary of all that Paul said before Felix.

Self-control . . .’ is a quality of character demanded of all who hope to be saved; and the persons who composed Paul’s audience on this occasion were notoriously deficient in it.

“Judgment to come . . .” This is one of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. (Hebrews 6:2) Briefly stated, it means that Jesus Christ will summon all the dead and living of the entire world to the judgment of the Great Day, and that every man shall receive the reward of the deeds done in the body, whether good or bad. The Christian concept of a universal judgment day is essential to all sanity in this present life. Without faith in the judgment, it must ever appear that the righteous are frustrated; but in this conception of what will finally occur, there lies the conviction that “even a cup of cold water” given in the name of the Lord shall not lose its reward.

Note: One may only grieve for the fact that widespread preaching on the subject of eternal judgment has subsided or disappeared altogether in many churches; but right here is the power that convicted sinners like those who heard Paul; and if modern churches would have any convicting power, let them preach the word of God on such subjects as this.

“When I find time . . .” Nothing that we know of either Felix or Drusilla leads us to suppose that a “convenient” day ever came for them. 2 Corinthians 6:2

says, “At the acceptable time, I will listen to You, behold, now is the day of salvation.”

Satan will see to it that no man finds it “convenient,” either to surrender himself to Jesus or to forsake the pursuits of the flesh which are antecedent to it.

Verse 26

Having learned bribery as a slave in the court of an emperor, Felix pursued the vice with a singleness of heart. Sir William M. Ramsay, *op. cit.*, p. 292 said, “As Felix was a man of wealth, brother of the richest man in Rome, and the husband of a princess, he could not have thought of a paltry bribe.” Pallas his brother was a millionaire, a friend and favorite of the Emperor Claudius. Ramsay also thought that Paul had come into possession of considerable wealth at this time; but this is not by any means certain. We are not told how Felix managed to convey to Paul the message that some money might loosen up the wheels of justice, but we are sure what Paul’s response would have been: he would have given him “another sermon on righteousness, self-control, and judgment to come!” (Orrin Root, *op. cit.*, p.183)

The results of Paul’s repeated preaching to Felix, J. R. Dummelow, *op. cit.*, p. 849 said, “The result was that Felix trembled but delayed his repentance, and Drusilla would not repent.”

Another result that might be observed in what is recorded here is that for the Christians of all ages, the giving of a bribe is as sinful and reprehensible as the taking of a bribe; otherwise, Paul’s friends would doubtless have raised the necessary money to procure his release.

“And converse with him . . .” Alexander Campbell, *Acts of apostles*, p. 164 said that this word is used only four times in the Christian Scriptures. “It indicates familiar conversation.”

The quaint comment of John Peter Lange, *op. cit.*, p. 428, sums up the situation which confronted Paul, “When avarice has taken deep root in the hearts of men invested with authority, justice is sold for them by money; and the

innocent receive no aid unless they pay for it, while the guilty who have bribed the judge, escape punishment.”

Verse 27

“Felix was succeeded . . .” The occasion of Felix’s recall was the outbreak of civil strife between the Jewish and Gentile elements of Caesarea, in which Felix’s intervention with troops led to the slaughter of many Jews (revealing, perhaps his true feelings against them). Through the intervention of his brother Pallas, he received no punishment beyond that of removal from office, which was taken by Festus.

PORCIUS FESTUS

This man was described by Josephus as wise, just and agreeable. However, nothing is known of his life before his accession to the procuratorship of Judaea, in which office he died after about two years. The picture of Festus that emerges in Acts contradicts Josephus, for he is revealed as willing to sacrifice Paul to please the Jews; and he further deliberately exploited Paul the prisoner for the entertainment of Agrippa and Bernice. G. P. Gould, *New Bible Dictionary*, op. cit., p. 421 said, “Paul’s appeal to Nero is the lasting condemnation of Festus.”

“Wishing to do the Jews a favor . . . left Paul imprisoned . . .”

REMARKS

Concerning this remarkable chapter, some further comments are in order. Paul spent two whole years in the old palace of Herod at Caesarea as a prisoner of Felix. How was this time employed by himself, and by Luke? Many have supposed that Paul wrote Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon during this period; and while a lot may be said in favor of such a view, agreement is felt with J. R. Dummelow who said, *Ibid*, “It seems more probable that all four were written in Rome.” “They of Caesarea’s household” (Philippians 4:22) naturally suggests Rome.

Luke employed himself by careful and extensive interviews and investigations leading to his twofold work, especially Luke's gospel. As J. R. Dummelow, *Ibid.*, said, "He probably interviewed Philip the evangelist, James the Lord's brother, and Mary the Virgin." But it is also highly probable, if not indeed certain, that he also interviewed many of the Pharisees in whose homes occurred so many of the events narrated in Luke, such Pharisees having been among the great company of the priests who became Christians. (Acts 6:7)

CHAPTER 25

This chapter contains two defenses of Paul, one legal and formal, after which Paul appealed to Caesar, and the other formal enough, but without any legal significance. Nevertheless, we shall treat them as two separate defenses. Each is important and significant in its own right. The first of these was before the new governor Festus (verse 1-12); the second was before Festus and his guess King Agrippa and his sister Bernice, (verse 13-27).

PORCIUS FESTUS TAKES OVER

Verse 1

While it may be true, as H. Leo Boles said that, "Festus was a better man than Felix, there being a strong contrast here between the honesty and the straightforwardness of Festus and the wickedness of Felix." It is true, nevertheless, that Festus was a worse governor, affording a startling proof that a wrong evil ruler is sometimes better than a good weak one.

The incompetence of Festus must have been the laughing-stock of the whole temple crowd in Jerusalem. He was naive, totally ignorant of the devices of the people he had come to rule, agreeable, gullible, and obsessed with such a desire for popularity that he would gladly have sacrificed an innocent man to enhance his standing with the Sanhedrinists.

It was that latter trait which, at the last, marred Felix's handling of Paul's case. J. S. Howson, *Life and Epistles of Saint Paul*, p. 614 declared, "Another governor of Judaea opened the prison that he might make himself popular; and Felix from the same motive riveted the chains of an innocent man. Thus the same enmity of the world against the gospel which set Barabbas free left Paul bound." Festus would fall into the same error as Felix.

"Up to Jerusalem . . ." Although Caesarea was his capital, Festus quite properly understood that Jerusalem, as the largest city of his province and the center of the religious hierarchy of Israel, was of major concern to him; hence the trip so soon after entering into his new dominion.

Verses 2-3

The pressure of this request from the leading Jews was implicit in the fact that they were powerful enough to have "brought about the removal of Festus' predecessor." (E. H. Plumptre, *Elliott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 162.)

They doubtless thought they could take advantage of Festus' newness in office and his natural desire to please such an important group of his subjects.

"Setting an ambush to kill him . . ." Festus, of course, had no idea whatever of the murderous duplicity and cunning deceit of the religious apparatus in the Judean capital. He should have known that the "favor" they had asked of him was based upon some damnable scheme of their own; but Festus seems to have accepted their request as honorable. It was his jealousy for his own prerogatives which led him to deny their request, as in the next verse.

Verses 4-5

This was a mortal danger for Paul; for if Festus had honored the request of the high priest and his group to bring Paul to Jerusalem, the apostle would almost certainly have been killed. Festus would not have sent such a large escort as Lysias had sent, for he was ignorant of any danger. God, however, protected Paul, using the new governor's vanity as the motivation of his desire of the

“favor” they coveted. John Wesley, *New Testament Commentary*, in loco, said, “By what invisible springs does God govern the world? Festus’ care to preserve the imperial privileges was the means of preserving Paul’s life.”

Verse 6

Festus’ prompt hearing was not due to the insistence of the high priestly conclave on action as soon as possible. What is in evidence here is not a new governor’s anxious desire to further justice, but a servile willingness to appease Paul’s bitter enemies in Jerusalem.

Verse 7

“The Jews who had come down . . .” This group was headed by the high priest, an imposing figure indeed; and many a procurator could tell of the power of such a man. The high priest just years earlier had been Ananias, but God had already struck that “white-washed wall,” and he had been replaced. Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament*, p. 339 said, “The high priest at this time was Ismael the son of Fabi, who had been appointed by Agrippa.”

“Charges . . . which they could not prove . . .” These charges were the same as those reviewed in the last chapter. There were some variations which the priests used in an effort to dress up their worthless case against Paul. These variations were ineffective before Festus as they had been before.

Verse 8

For all their cunning, the priests overreached themselves by alleging Paul’s sinning against Caesar; for Festus could hardly have let that charge be tried by them.

That it was not true is evident in Festus’ apparent willingness to declare Paul innocent of the charges against Caesar, if Paul would consent to be tried by the Jews on the other allegations (verse 9).

Verse 9

Paul very well knew that the incompetent Festus was no match for the temple Jews who had no intention whatever of trying Paul; all they wanted was to expose him sufficiently that their assassins could kill him; after all, It must be supposed that after two years those forty conspirators were getting pretty hungry.

Paul's only hope of saving his life lay in exactly what he did, appealing to Caesar.

Verses 10-11

This was absolutely the only avenue left open to Paul. The namby-pamby Festus knew he was innocent, but insisted on taking him to Jerusalem, where Paul would have been murdered.

Paul's rebuke of this governor, in such an appeal, was fully deserved; but his abrupt appeal to go to Caesar must have come as a shocking surprise to Festus. Having his very first case appealed to Caesar was not exactly the way he had hoped to begin his term as governor.

"I am standing . . ." has the meaning of "I have been sanding a long time" at Caesar's judgment-seat, that is, Festus' tribunal; and "I ought to be judged" here, rather than before some court in Jerusalem.

"I do not refuse to die . . ." Paul meant by this that he was not appealing for the sake of avoiding punishment for a crime, but in order to prevent his being murdered.

E. H. Plumptre, *op. cit.*, p. 163 said, "By this appeal, he delivered himself from the injustice of a weak and temporizing judge." Every Roman citizen has a right of appeal from lower tribunals in the empire to the final court of the emperor in Rome. It was his Roman citizenship which saved Paul's life here.

Verse 12

“Conferred with his council . . .” This was not the group of priests, but his own legal advisors.

“To Caesar you shall go . . .” The Caesar mentioned here, had not yet developed the character by which he is notoriously remembered in history, this view of Festus’ words would appear to be wrong. In 59 A.D. Nero was ending the first five good years of his rule; and as yet there was no evidence of the outrages that came later. F. F. Bruce, the Book of Acts, p. 478 said, “There was little in A.D. 59 that gave warning of events in A. D. 64.”

Verse 13

“King Agrippa . . .” In this ruler, the last of the Herodian dynasty appeared; and with his death in 100 A. D., the sordid record of the whole infamous family ended.

Agrippa and his sister Bernice had another sister Drusilla, all of them being great-grandchildren of Herod the Great who had sought to murder Christ in his infant cradle. We shall note these characters a bit further.

AGRIPPA AND BERNICE

Agrippa II was the son of Agrippa I who was the son of Aristobulus the son of Herod the Great by Mariamne the Maccabean princess, thus being a fourth generation of the Herod’s, whose names figure prominently in the New Testament. He was appointed governor of Chalcis in A. D. 48 by Claudius, but traded that position for a kingship over the tetrarchy of Philip in A. D. 54. In the great war (66 to 70 A.D.), he sided with the Romans; and after the war, was confirmed in his kingdom, living till A.D. 100.

When Bernice (his sister) was only sixteen, and already twice married, first to Alexander of Alexandria and then to her uncle Herod, the king of Chalcis, who died in A.D. 48, she moved in with her brother Agrippa I.

Juvenal the Roman satirist, called her “Agrippa’s incestuous sister;” and after a brief marriage she evidently made quiet rumors of the relationship to her

brother, she again took up residence with him at Caesarea Philippi. Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities and Wars of the Jews* translated by William Whiston, p. 594 said, “She and her brother were the ‘royalty’ who heard Paul on this occasion.”

“Saluted Festus . . .” Some have supposed that as “a king” Agrippa outranked Festus, but this is not the case. John Wesley, *op. cit.*, p. in loco was correct in the comment that, “The visit here was a compliment paid by the vassal king to the representative of Rome.”

Verse 14

It was only natural for Festus to discuss such a prisoner as Paul with his guests; and his reason for this will appear at once.

Verse 15

“Asking for a sentence of condemnation upon him . . .” This is important as showing that the Jerusalem leaders had demanded a guilty verdict of Festus; and as J. R. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, p. 860 noted, “They desired from the judge partiality not justice; and they probably offered him money.”

Verse 16

From this it is crystal clear that the high priests had requested a guilty verdict against Paul without the formality of any kind of hearing.

Verse 17

Festus left out of sight his purpose in all promptness, namely, that of pleasing Paul’s accusers.

Verse 18

Here in the mouth of Felix is the verdict of innocence which he did not have the moral fiber to announce.

Verse 19

Pagan that he was, Festus spoke sneeringly here of “a dead Jesus, Paul said was alive,” affirming by such language his skepticism and lack of concern. Albert Barnes, *op. cit.*, p. 344 said, “In this manner a Roman magistrate could speak of the most glorious truth in the Christian religion.”

Verse 20

This was a misrepresentation. There was no need to inquire any further of charges that had been proved, were in fact incapable of proof; and Festus’ proposal was made solely out of a desire to please his subjects in Jerusalem.

Verse 21

“The emperor . . . Caesar . . .” These two titles given here to Nero, should be noted. The first of these is actually “Augustus,” (Revised Version margin), which says the title given by the Roman Senate on January 17, 27 B.C. to Gaius Caesar Octavianus. (63 B. C. to A. D. 14). (Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 2, p. 686)

Still a third title of Roman emperors, “Lord” is used a little later in this chapter (verse 26). This title of “Lord” or “Dominus: carried a divine connotation and was first used by Caligula (A. D. 12-41).

Albert Barnes, *op. cit.*, p. 345 said, “Augustus and Tiberius rejected such a title and would not suffer it to be applied to them.” However, we may suppose that Nero would have received it gladly.

Verse 22

“I also would like to hear the man . . .” Agrippa and his sister must have heard many things about Jesus Christ and the faith regarding Him, because it was their great-grandfather who had slaughtered the innocent children of Judaea in a vain attempt to murder the Lord in infancy; it was their father who restored the dominion of Herod the Great, seized and executed James the apostle with the sword, and imprisoned Peter who was delivered by an angel. It

was also an uncle of theirs who had murdered John the Baptist and mocked the Lord during His Passion.

In view of whom Agrippa and Bernice were, their willingness to give Christianity a polite hearing was a great victory for the faith, despite the obvious fact that the hearing was arranged somewhat as a form of entertainment. In this scene, there began to be fulfilled the promise of the Lord that Paul would bear testimony and “His name” before the “Gentiles and kings, and children of Israel!” (Chapter 9:15 and Isaiah 62:2)

The setting of this scene was Caesarea, where some thirteen years earlier Herod Agrippa I, the father of this King Agrippa, Bernice, and Drusilla, suffered a divine judgment in a sudden and horrible death.

ARRANGEMENTS ARE MADE FOR PAUL’S APPEARANCE

Verse 23

“Great pomp . . .” The touch of the eyewitness narrator is evident; and one may imagine the ostentatious display of royal apparel, military uniforms, soldiers at attention, the decorations and flags that adorned the hall of meeting, and , over all, the proud demeanor of the Roman deputy Festus, who would hardly have allowed himself to be surpassed in splendor by his royal guests.

How sad it all was. What a pity, Luke must have thought, that all that external beauty was lavished upon a weakling like Festus and his profligate guests.

Little could any of them have realized that their place in history would turn almost together upon the important little man whom the soldiers brought chained into their presence. They did not know this, but Paul knew it; “The weakness of God is stronger than men.” (1 Corinthians 1:25)

Chief captains and principal men of the city . . . “ These were the chiliarchs of the Roman garrison commanded by the governor, each of whom led a tenth of a legion or a thousand men.

Verse 24

“Both at Jerusalem and here . . .” is a little ambiguous, the doubt being whether it applies to the “suit” having been pressed in both places, or to “the Jews” of both places joined in the suit. E. H. Plumptre, *Ibid*, applied it to both, saying, “It would seem from the addition “and also here,” that the Jews of Caesarea had also taken part in the proceedings, and that they too had been clamoring for a capital sentence.”

Verse 25

“Nothing worthy of death . . .” How quickly this public announcement would have spread through the city, and how happy Philip and all of the Christians there must have been upon hearing of the governor’s verdict. What a shame that the governor had withheld it till Paul, out of concern for his life, had been forced to appeal to Caesar.

Verse 26

“Nothing definite about him to write . . .” This was what was bugging the procurator. Why not write the facts, namely:

- (1) that having found Paul innocent, he did not have the moral courage to release him, and
- (2) that not having the courage to tell the Jews, he had tried to persuade Paul to go up to Jerusalem and be tried by the Sanhedrin, Festus of course looking on.

Verse 27

“Seems absurd . . .” What was truly unreasonable was Festus’ own unconscionable delay in announcing the verdict of innocence; and it was not less unreasonable that he proposed sending Paul back to the people who were so determined to kill him.

The next chapter gives Paul’s speech.

CHAPTER 26

The first twenty-three verses give Paul's address, as outlined by F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, p. 488.

- (1) The complimentary beginning of his speech, (verses 1-3)
- (2) His Pharisaic heritage, (verses 4-8)
- (3) His former persecuting zeal, (verses 9-11)
- (4) His vision on Damascus road, (verses 12-18)
- (5) His lifelong obedience to vision, (verses 19-20)
- (6) His arrest, (verse 21) and
- (7) His teaching. (verses 22-23)

The rest of the chapter gives Festus' interruption and the exchange between Paul and King Agrippa (verses 24-29), also the conclusion of the meeting (verses 30-32).

PAUL'S FIFTH DEFENSE: BEFORE AGRIPPA AND BERNICE

Verse 1

"You are permitted . . ." As a vassal king, Agrippa was in town to honor the all-powerful deputy of Caesar, whose "five resident cohorts of the Imperial Army under his command" spoke eloquently of the dread authority on the Tiber.

Thus, as A. C. Hervey, *Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 18, Acts ii, p. 264 said, "it was by the courtesy of Festus that Agrippa thus took the chief place."

"Paul stretched forth his hand . . ." This characteristic gesture must have been something quite unusual about it. Did he make this with the arm that was encumbered by a chain?

Verse 2

"I consider myself fortunate . . ." The privilege of addressing a king and the governor was one that Paul appreciated; and, since he had already been cleared

of all charges of sinning against Caesar, he could confine himself strictly to things pertaining to the gospel, which things alone were the cause of the hatred he had encountered.

“Accused by the Jews . . .” “The Jews” would have the meaning of “the whole nation of the Jews,” and that is neither what Paul said nor meant. Alexander Campbell, *Acts of Apostles*, p. 169-170) translated this expression simply as “Jews” both here and in verse 7, as having in both passages the meaning of certain Jews.”

Verse 3

“Especially . . .” Not only was Paul glad for the opportunity of addressing a man, who like Festus, was knowledgeable of the Jewish religion, the holy Scriptures and the prophecies which foretold the Messiah; but, also, the chance to speak to these terminal representatives of the Herodian kings must have thrilled Paul’s heart; but, over and beyond all this he hoped for an opportunity to open the young king’s heart to the truth.

“Listen to me patiently . . .” Paul made no promise of brevity, as had Tertullus (24:4), the inference being that he would speak at length, which it may be assumed he did.

Verse 4

Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament, Acts*, p. 848 stressed the great likelihood of Paul’s having been “distinguished in the school of Gamaliel for zeal in the Jewish religion.” Some of Paul’s bitterest accusers had known him during his school days and as the young persecutor.

Verse 5

Paul does not here disclaim being still a Pharisee, “Because, it was for the chief hope of the Pharisees that he was now accused (A. C. Hervey, *op. cit.*, p. 264).

“The strictest sect . . .” This was a proper description of the Pharisees’ beliefs, which stressed the utmost compliance with the Law of Moses.

Verse 6

“The promise . . .” Without any doubt this refers to the Messiah, the promised Savior who would take away the sin of the world. The relationship of the coming of the Holy One to the Pharisees’ belief lay in their faith in the resurrection of the dead. That belief in the resurrection was the foundation upon which the primitive church received the resurrection of Christ, the same event being that which declared Him “Son of God with power” (Romans 1:4). By stressing this common ground between the Pharisees and the Christians, that is, the belief in the resurrection of the dead, Paul hoped to enlist on behalf of the truth any good will that might have remained among the Jews.

Verse 7

“Twelve tribes . . .” Despite the widespread opinion to the effect that the ten northern tribes “disappeared,” there is no doubt that as John Wesley, Commentary on the New Testament in loco said, “A great part of the ten tribes had at various times returned to their country,” Anna, for example, having been of the tribe of Asher (Luke 2:36).

“For this hope . . .” refers to the hope of the resurrection of the dead as proved by the resurrection of Christ. In fact, Paul made our Lord’s resurrection to be the only sure proof of that hope; and, as Robert Milligan, Analysis of the New Testament, p. 404 said, “He taught that the hope of Israel was to be found only in and through Jesus of Nazareth!”

“Accused by Jews . . .” Everett F. Harrison, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, p. 404, said Paul’s meaning was given to him thus, “It is an utterly amazing thing that Jews who have hope in the resurrection should accuse Paul for entertaining the same hope.”

Verse 8

This identified Paul’s principal accusers as being the Sadducees who denied the resurrection; and his affirmation that Jesus had risen from the dead further identified them as murderers of the Son of God. John Peter Lange, Commentary on Acts, p. 441, said their hatred, therefore, “Was principally instigated by his preaching the resurrection, and preaching it through Christ.”

Verse 9

Having already shown that he was one with Agrippa in the hope of the resurrection which he supposedly held, Paul here moved to find common ground with him, as having been, like Agrippa's whole family, a persecutor of the church.

"I thought to myself . . ." means that Paul truly believed, "proving that a man may be conscientious even when engaged in enormous wickedness." (John Peter Lange, Commentary on Acts, p. 441)

"To myself . . ." W. R. Walker, Studies in Acts, p. 89 said, "All thinking with self is self-centered . . . It is only when we center our thinking in Christ that we think correctly."

Here, as J. W. McGarvey, *op. cit.*, p. 254 said it is clear that, "Paul thought he was doing God service; but this must not prevent us from interpreting the remark about kicking against the goads as referring to the goads of conscience."

Verse 10

"Many of the saints . . ." Although Paul had avoided calling the Christians "saints" when he spoke in Jerusalem, here before an unbiased audience he did so. Lange, as quoted by John Wesley, *op. cit.*, *in loco* said, "In order to bear witness for Christ and His church."

"They were put to death . . ." indicates that many more Christians lost their lives through Saul's activities than would be supposed from the mention of Stephen only in the New Testament.

"I cast my vote against them . . ." H. Leo Boles, Commentary on the Acts, p. 402 said, "The Greek here means 'I cast down my pebble,' . . . They literally cast their pebbles into the urn, white for acquittal, black for condemnation."

A. C. Hervey, *op. cit.*, p. 265 declared that this clause is equivalent to, "I was one of those who in the Sanhedrin voted for their death."

Verse 11

The Revised Version Bible seems to say that some of the Christians were caused to blaspheme. Everett F. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 478 said, "But the tense of

the Greek word indicates that Paul failed in this;” he only attempted to cause them to commit such a sin.

“Even to foreign cities . . .” is quite a revealing phrase, indicating a much more extensive range of Saul’s persecution, which obviously included operations against the church in many places besides Damascus.

Verses 12-16

We are indebted to H, Leo Boles for this summary of additional information derived from this third account:

The light was brighter than the sun and the light shone on the whole company. (Verse 13)

We had all fallen to the ground. Jesus spoke in Hebrew. (Verse 14)

Jesus said, “It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” (Verse 14)

“Hard for you to kick against the goads . . .” This is allegedly a Gentile proverb; (not in use), among the Jews; but there is no reason to limit the prevalence of it. Every agricultural country on earth has either this or a similar proverb.

Verse 17

This verse was the Lord’s solemn promise to Paul that He would be protected, not only from “the people,” meaning the Jews, but from “the Gentiles” as well. Paul was repeatedly endangered from both sources. Only by such assurance could a man have acted with the courage Paul displayed throughout his career.

Verse 18

“Forgiveness of sins . . .” That men should receive this blessing was the principal burden of apostolic preaching, the great need of humanity having ever been that of reconciliation with God and the restoration of fellowship with the Eternal.

With forgiveness of sins, all of the hardships of life, all of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, all of the disappointments and sufferings, all of life’s frustrations and sorrows, resolve at last in eternal glory for the redeemed;

but without forgiveness of sins, the most favored and successful life, the most inevitably resolve into a hopeless grave and a resurrection of everlasting shame and contempt. “Forgiveness” is one of the great New Testament words.

“Who have been sanctified by faith in Me . . .” What Paul was affirming in this expression was not the popular heresy that people are saved by “faith only,” but that the forgiveness of their sins is available by means of “the faith regarding” Christ, that is, through Christianity.

Verses 19-21

“I did not prove disobedient . . .” This has the effect of saying: O King, you could not expect me to have violated a voice from heaven.

“Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem . . .” Paul’s use of the word “first” does not always denote a chronological order, but has the meaning of “the first thing I want to mention.”

“Gentiles . . . should repent and turn to God.” This is exactly the statement of God’s redemptive plan for believers and it means “repent and be baptized.” (Acts 3:19)

William Barclay, *Turning to God*, p. 47 and p. 50 said, “The first demand was the demand of repentance . . . the second demand was the demand for baptism.” Acts 2:38 and 3:19 are confirmations of this.

“Performing deeds worthy of repentance . . .” Such a plank as this, in the platform of God’s will, would have a special pertinence to Agrippa and Bernice. Orrin Root, *Acts*, p. 190, said, “The dissolute Agrippa needed to be told, ‘Live as men who have repented should’ (Goodspeed).”

Verse 21

“Some Jews . . .” means, in a sense their nation, as represented by its highest authorities.

Verses 22-23

“Help from God . . .” In view of the marvelous deliverances Paul had already received, protecting him against the skill and cunning of his powerful enemies, even his foes must have been willing to admit that God had helped him.

“Nothing but what the prophets and Moses said was going to take place . . .” G. H. C. MacGreggor, *op. cit.*, p. 328 noted, “That the Jews refused to receive Isaiah 53 as Messianic, therefore denying that the Christ was prophetically represented as a sufferer,” which is of course true; but in this very blindness to what their prophets so emphatically foretold lay the secret of their rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This insistence of Paul that the new institution was, indeed and truthfully identified with that Divine institution set forth typically and prophetically in the Old Testament is evident in all of his writings.

“By reason of His resurrection . . . should be the first . . .” There is a genuine sense in which Christ’s resurrection was first, despite instances of raising the dead both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Robert Milligan, *op. cit.*, p. 406 said, “He was the first that rose above the power of death. Lazarus died again.”

A. C. Hervey, *op. cit.*, p. 267 cautioned against a misunderstanding of this verse saying, “Christ was the first to rise, and He will be followed by them that are His. But it is not true today that He was the first to give light to the Jews and Gentiles and will be followed by others doing the same.”

Verse 24

W. R. Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 91 declared, “Festus had advertised his ignorance at the beginning of the hearing; but in this interruption, he headlined it.” There is no light to the blind, no music to the deaf; and W. R. Walker, *Ibid*, said, “This poor fool thought that because he could not understand Paul’s sermon, no one could.”

“Said in a loud voice . . .” is another detail, revealing the eyewitness of the scene described.” (A. C. Hervey, *op. cit.*, p. 267)

By this loud cry charging Paul with madness, Festus betrayed the total lack of spiritual discernment which is always the mark of the carnal man. A typically cynical subaltern (a rank lower than captain) of Rome he decided to break up a meeting with which he had no sympathy at all. It must have been a great shock

to him that his royal guests were getting the message, and that they were deeply and favorably impressed with it.

Verse 25

“I am not out of my mind . . .” Paul was the sanest man in the hall where he spoke, with the exception of Luke; and his quiet, firm denial bore the stamp of truth. John Wesley, *op. cit.*, exclaimed, “How inexpressibly beautiful is his reply! how strong! yet how decent and respectful. Madmen do not call men by their names and titles of honor. Thus Paul refuted the charge.”

Verse 26

“This has not been done in a corner . . .” That earthquake which accompanied the Son of God in His visitation of our planet is still sending shock waves around the earth.

The fact of His birth split human history into B.C. and A. D.; His crucifixion bruised the head of Satan himself; His resurrection brought life and immortality to light through the gospel; His teachings monitor the deeds and thoughts of all men; and His word shall judge the living and the dead at the last day. Done in a corner? Yes, in a little corner of the universe known as Planet Earth; but that earth can never forget Him, or get rid of Him. As some of the Sadducees and Pharisees were able to see while He was among them, “The world has gone after Him.” (John 12:19)

Verse 27

Agrippa was doubtless embarrassed by this question. His pagan host would laugh at him if he replied in the affirmative; and yet there is a possibility that he came very near to doing so.

Verses 28-29

“In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian . . .” Paul’s reply shows that he believed Agrippa’s response was that of one half-converted, hence the insistence of this appeal. The very use of the honored and holy word “Christian” by such a one as Agrippa is in itself weighty.

One should be on guard against allegations of a certain class of writers who speak of this word as did G. H. C. MacGreggor, op. cit., p. 330 who said, "The word Christian on Agrippa's lips would certainly be a sneer; his reply cannot imply that Paul is on the verge of converting him."

On the other hand, that is exactly what this word implies. And as for the word "Christian" ever having been a term of contempt for the followers of Jesus, this is one of the most fallacious conceits that ever fogged the mind of students of God's word.

There is no historical evidence that "Christian" was ever used with an unfavorable connotation. It is amazing that a class of scholars always screaming about "hard evidence" will themselves accept the proposition regarding "Christian" without any evidence at all!

Verse 30

If the king had not been deeply moved and "almost persuaded" by Paul, would he not have risen when Festus tried to break up the assembly with that loud cry? Of course he would have. The very fact that he kept on sitting there shows that he wanted no part of Festus' rejection of what Paul was saying. Courtesy demanded that no one leave till after king did so; therefore Paul was enabled to continue somewhat even after Festus' interruption.

Verse 31

Thus, in succession, through five defenses, the verdict had been in favor of Paul's innocence, without exception.

Verse 32

Thus a Herod testifies to the innocence and sincerity of the apostle Paul; and , although there is no evidence that Agrippa was ever any more than half-persuaded to be a Christian, this favorable verdict from him is nevertheless of great significance.

Here is the record of Paul's five defenses made in Jerusalem and Caesarea; and with his appeal to Caesar his case was transferred to Rome. This involved him in

a long and dangerous voyage which will be unfolded by Luke in the next two chapters.

The thing that stands out in all of Paul's defenses was the speaker's innocence and sincerity in preaching the unsearchable riches of the crucified and risen Savior.

CHAPTER 27

V. PAUL'S VOYAGE TO ROME

The occasion of the voyage recounted here was the transfer of the apostle Paul to Rome. God's angel had assured him that he would testify in Rome (23:11); and now that was to be accomplished.

Sir William M. Ramsay, *Pictures of the Apostolic Church*, p. 310 was doubtlessly correct in the affirmation that, "The result of his trial before the supreme court of the empire was that he was acquitted, and a decisive verdict was thus pronounced in favor of the free teaching of the Christian faith."

The intriguing story of this voyage and shipwreck is that of an eyewitness, its vividness, wealth of detail, and vocabulary making this certain.

H. Leo Boles, *Ibid*, p. 309 has given an excellent outline of this chapter:

- (1) aboard the ship of Adramyttium, (verses 1-5),
- (2) aboard the ship Alexandria, (verses 6-12),
- (3) the storm, (verses 13-29), and
- (4) the shipwreck, (verses 40-44).

Verse 1

They proceeded to deliver Paul . . ." The antecedent of this pronoun is Festus and Agrippa and Bernice.

"Some other prisoners . . ." Sir William Ramsey, *Ibid*, p. 302 believed these to have been: "Criminals, who were being taken to Rome to amuse by their death in the arena the idle populace, like Paul, had the distinction of being remitted for trial before the highest court of the empire."

“Julius . . .” was a Roman officer and is presented by the sacred authors in a favorable light.

“Augustus” was the title of a cohort, and by this time had become a title of the emperor.

Verse 2

The ship Adramyttium, was a tramp vessel making all ports along the coast of Asia Minor, that being the meaning of “Asia” as used by Luke.

“Aristarchus . . . with us . . .” It is not certain if Aristarchus was a prisoner or not. Don De Welt, *Acts Made Actual*, p. 324, thought he was, but the text in this place represents him apart from “other prisoners” in verse 1.

Paul’s reference to Aristarchus as “my fellow prisoner” (Colossians 4:10) may refer to the fact that Aristarchus was “Paul’s voluntary companion in Rome.” (Orrin Root, *Acts*, p. 193).

It would appear that Luke attended Paul as his personal physician for a period of year, and that he and also Aristarchus attended Paul constantly. Such services were paid for, either by Luke or Aristarchus, or by Paul, or by the churches; and it would seem to be more likely that Paul was the paymaster. Earlier, Paul had worked with his hands as a tent-maker to support himself.

“We put out to sea . . .” “We” indicates that Luke had been with Paul throughout his detention in Caesarea. Although the port of embarkation is not specified, it was in all probability Caesarea.

Verse 3

“Treated Paul with consideration . . .” The respect and deference to Paul are remarkable, as shown throughout the voyage.

“Go to his friends . . .” Paul was widely known among the Christians, as well as among the Jewish opposition; and this reference shows that nearly anywhere Paul might have stopped, there were Christians there to welcome and encourage him.

Verses 4-5

“The winds were contrary . . .” The route to Rome lay in a westerly direction, but the winds coming from almost exactly the direction they wished to go forced them to sail northward. It was late in August or early September, approaching the time when navigation of the Mediterranean would no longer have been safe for ancient sailing vessels.

“Myra . . .” J. R. Dummelow, *op. cit.*, p. 851 said, “this harbor was important as one of the great harbors in the corn (wheat) trade between Egypt and Rome.”

Finding a ship sailing directly to Rome was quickly fulfilled at Myra.

Verses 6-8

A NEW SHIP, BUT THE SAME OLD PROBLEM

Like many things that occur in every life, a different ship did not solve the problem, which was not the ship, but the wind. “An Alexandria ship . . .” This was a great vessel for those times, carrying a cargo of wheat and 276 passengers and crew, estimated by H. Leo Boles, *Commentary on Acts*, p. 415 as a vessel of “ten or eleven tons.”

Don De Welt, *op. cit.*, p. 326 said, “Paul’s ship sank! He noted, wheat is always a dangerous cargo, due to the possibility of shifting; and he went on to relate how in very recent days, he narrowly escaped shipwreck “between the Dardanelles and Malta, “due to the shifting cargo of wheat in rough weather.”

The plan was go sail north of Crete, the great island laying south of Greece and a little east; but the wind would not permit it, so they sailed southward around the eastern extremity of that island with the intention of creeping along just off its southern shore, leaving it on their right instead of their left.

“Fair Havens . . .” Here they took “a breather” from the contrary winds and held a conference on the advisability of continuing the voyage at that time of the year. This place is now called Kalolomonia. G. H. C. MacGreggor, *Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. IX, p. 334 said, “It lies about half-way along the southern coast of Crete, near Lasa, the ruins of which have been identified.”

Verses 9-10

It is altogether possible that Paul was invited to give his opinion. Paul was a man of wide experience, having already suffered shipwreck three times (2 Corinthians 11:25); and the respect in which Julius held Paul makes it nearly certain that Paul's opinion had been asked.

“The fast was already over . . .” is a reference to the Jewish Day of Atonement.

“I perceive . . .” These words suggest that Paul was not speaking in this instance from any inspiration and that he was only giving a personal opinion based upon experience.

Verses 11-12

“The centurion . . .” appears in this passage being in full command of the vessel, his authority being even greater than that of the ship's owner and the captain. This was probably due to the vessel's being a government chartered carrier in the wheat trade supplying the imperial city with grain.

The captain and the owner gave a green light to proceed to Phoenix, a much more comfortable place to spend the winter. Paul's voice seems to have been about the only one raised against it.

“The majority . . .” indicates that many participated in the discussion of whether or not to proceed. Added to the desire to find what most of them considered a more “suitable place” to winter was the fact that Phoenix was only a few short hours away, lying northward around the great Cape Matala.

“Northeast and southeast . . .” The Greek words here are, “down the southwest wind and down the northwest winds”; and scholars do not know what Luke meant by this.

Verses 13-14

Luke only reported what happened; but what happened here is much like what happens in the lives of many who, being tempted into some wrong move by enticing opportunities, find at last devastation and shipwreck.

“The south wind blew softly . . . but before very long there rushed down upon them a violent wind called, the Euraquilo (a northeaster). Luke only reported

what happened; but what happened here is much like what happens in the lives of many, who, being tempted into some wrong move by enticing opportunities, find at last devastation and shipwreck.

“Close inshore . . .” indicates that the south wind was a little too good; they had difficulty keeping their distance from the shore. Many a temptation carries this quality of being just a little too convenient! This very south wind was related to the storm that wrecked them.

Verse 15

“And when the ship was caught . . .” Some situations must be guarded against before they occur, not after they have developed; and so it was here. They had already passed the point of no return to the Fair Havens they had just left. Many wayward souls have discovered that some decisions admit of no correction. They like the ship are “caught.”

“Let ourselves be driven along . . .” The ship and all on board were now at the mercy of the winds and waves.

Verse 16

“Scarcely able to get the ship’s boat under control . . .” has reference to the dinghy which they had trailed along behind the vessel anticipatory to landing in Phoenix. They were so sure they had gained their purpose, that they had not even taken the trouble to hoist it aboard before sailing. It was now waterlogged, but it might be needed; and so they labored with great difficulty to bring it aboard and secure it.

“We . . .” Some of the passengers, including Luke, had been required to aid in rescuing the boat, the sailors alone not being able to do it.

Verse 17

“Undergirding the ship . . .” Luke’s medical word “bandaging the ship” describes accurately what they did. In modern times this is called “frapping” a vessel, referring to the passing of cables around the exterior of the hull to give it greater strength and keep it from breaking up during a storm.

“The Syrtis . . .” These were the great African quick-sands. H. Leo Boles, op. cit., p. 419 said, “The greater and lesser ‘Syrtis’ were on the north coast of Africa, one west of Cyrene, the other near Carthage.”

“They lowered the gear . . .” Most commentators suppose that this refers to lowering sails and spars; but it is possible that the mast also was lowered. In all probability, the mast also was lowered to prevent top-heaviness.

Verses 18-19

All thought of profit had vanished. It was a survival situation, and everything that could be spared was cast overboard.

Verse 20

Despair seems to have enveloped all on board. The ship, and only two prospects, that of being driven onto the coast of Africa, or of being shattered upon some island in the Mediterranean.

Verses 21-26

Paul’s mention of what he had predicted was not in a spiteful attitude of “I told you so,” but was for the purpose of inducing a more ready belief of what he was then about to say.

It was reaffirmed by the Lord’s angel that Paul would stand before Caesar; and the message of cheer which Paul here delivered was significant, not as his opinion, but as a clear word from the Almighty.

“Do not be afraid . . . God has granted you all those who are sailing with you . . .” Paul had been praying for the lives of all on board, and God had answered his prayers by granting that the entire company should not lose their lives.

“We must run aground on a certain island . . .” This meant they would not be cast upon the coast of Africa. Before leaving this record of Paul’s reassurance of those aboard the ill-starred ship of Alexandria, it should be noted that many times wicked people are benefited marvelously by the mere fact of being in the company of the righteous.

The sailors of his ship were selfish, and the soldiers cruel, but their lives were saved because of Paul. Likewise, the prisoners would most certainly have been slaughtered except for the centurion's desire to spare Paul.

Verse 27

“Being driven about . . .” Any person who has ever been in a hurricane knows that winds come from opposite directions, depending upon the location of the eye of the storm. The Adriatic Sea is the Mediterranean sea.

Verse 28

“Fathoms . . .” This measurement was about six feet; thus the water's depth was decreasing from 120 feet to 90 feet rather quickly.

Verse 29

“They cast four anchors . . . and wished for daybreak . . .” Many a time in life when there is hardly anything to do except to cast anchor and wait for day, filling the hours with prayer, even as Paul did.

The moment of truth was about to come to those tortured bone-tired, occupants of the doomed ship. It was a moment to try the hearts of men; and, from what happened immediately, some miserably failed the test.

Verse 30

“Escape from the ship . . .” This the sailors would have done leaving all on board to perish; for without them, the passengers could not have beached the ship. In this sad moment of fear and apprehension, they forgot the high and unselfish code of the seas, cravenly thinking to save their own lives, no matter what happened to others.

They seemed to know that if their purpose was discovered, they would not have been allowed to do such a thing, hence their pretending to be putting out anchors at the bow of the vessel.

Verses 31-32

The unbelief of the sailors is seen in their refusal to accept Paul's assurance that no lives would be lost; but, by this time, the centurion and the soldiers had

far too much respect for Paul's words to ignore the warning given here. They promptly cut the ropes, setting the dinghy free in the raging sea.

A glimpse of the workings of Providence is seen in this episode. Although Paul had been assured by an angel of the Highest that no lives would be lost, he nevertheless did not understand such a promise as releasing him from the necessity of due caution and prudence be exercised by himself. God requires of all men, that they themselves should do everything possible to reach desired ends, understanding the providence of the Father begins where the ability of men leaves off.

Verse 33

“Fourteenth . . . “ This would have been reckoned from the onset of the storm shortly after sailing from Fair Havens in Crete.

“Having taken nothing . . .” has reference to having no “meal” in the usual sense. What eating they had done was by a mouthful here and there as chance afforded.

Verse 34

Note the leadership of a man like Paul, who by the sheer weight of his moral authority and courage rises to the place of command in the hour of life's great emergencies. It is the prisoner who rallied all on board, compelled them to eat, emphatically assured them that they would not die, and, a moment later, solemnly gave thanks before them all!

There are no greater examples of moral courage and authority than that which is visible here.

Verses 35-37

“Give thanks to God . . .” This thanks was not merely for the food, but for the promise that all should live. What an impression must have been etched forever into the minds of those who saw this prince among men, pausing in such circumstances to offer praise and thanksgiving to the Father in heaven.

Note: It is the extreme emergency that calls forth the true leader.

Verse 38

The purpose of throwing out the balance of cargo was to reduce the ship's draught in order to make it possible to sail it closer to the shore.

Verse 39

Here the necessity of the sailors continuing with the ship was apparent to all. Without their skilled hands, all would have been lost.

Verse 40

“Loosening the ropes of the rudders . . .” Orrin Root, *op. cit.*, p. 198 said, “The rudder bands had secured the rudder, so it would not be beaten about by the waves during the night. Now they were loosed so the rudder could be used in steering.”

Verse 41

“Where two seas met . . .” This was a barely submerged shoal, the sands of which had been piled together by water action on both sides. It was invisible; therefore they plowed the ship into it, with the result given in this verse. This was near enough to the beach that all passengers and crew could make it to land.

Verse 42

This was the old Roman code, the custodian of a prisoner should answer with his life for any who escaped; and the present emergency suggested to the soldiers that it would be better to kill the prisoners than to risk any of them getting away.

Verse 43

“Kept them from their intention . . .” Only a command from the centurion was sufficient to do this, and he promptly gave it. The actual danger of prisoners escaping was genuine; and, accordingly, he commanded the soldiers who could swim to go overboard at once, thus getting to land first, and thereby being able to keep sharp watch on all of the prisoners.

Verse 44

“And others on various things . . .” F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 519 thought these words, Might conceivably mean "and some on some of the people from the ship.”

The journey to Rome was thus interrupted by a disastrous shipwreck. Luke would at once (in the next chapter) recount the resumption of the trip, reporting what happened during the delay on the island of Malta. In it all the “finger of God” is clearly visible.

CHAPTER 28

The shipwrecked passengers and crew were all saved alive, fulfilling Paul’s prophecy made at a moment when all hope had perished. The population of Malta aided in the rescue, building a fire and “receiving them kindly.” Paul was bitten by a snake, (verse 1-6). Hospitality was extended to the victims of shipwreck by the first man of the island; and Paul wrought many cures of the sick and suffering of Malta, (verses 7-10).

The voyage to Rome was continued after three months, ending shortly at Puteoli, terminal port of the grain ship; and thence by land, Paul soon arrived in Rome, being greeted by brethren on the way, (verses 11-16).

As always, Paul sought and obtained first an interview with Jewish leaders who set a day to hear him a week later, (verses 17-22).

The Jews of Rome, as invariably throughout Paul’s ministry, rejected Christ, despite the fact that some believed, (verses 23-28).

The Book of Acts is concluded by a brief summary of the two whole years of Paul’s imprisonment; and the curtain rings down with Paul still in prison, because, when Luke wrote, the apostle’s release, although pending ,had not yet occurred, (verses 30-31).

Verses 1-2

“Melita . . .” This island, is the one now known as Malta. Mention of the “Sea of Adria” in 27:27 led some to suppose that Meleda, an island of the Dalmatian

coast in the Adriatic sea, was meant; but there is abundant proof that the whole Mediterranean was called “Adria” by the sailors.

“The natives . . .” did not speak Greek. Everett F. Harrison, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, p. 337 said, “They spoke a language derived from Phoenician, and were little affected by the Greek-Roman culture.”

This island of Malta is 12 miles broad, 20 miles long, and 60 miles distant from Sicily. John Wesley, Commentary on the New Testament, in loco, said, “It yields abundance of honey, whence its name,.”

“Rain . . . cold . . .” Such storms as they had encountered always dump large quantities of water; and late in the autumn the weather was very disagreeable. The survivors needed and received help.

Verses 3-4

“A viper came out . . .” The statement of the islanders that “justice hath not suffered to live” regarded Paul’s death so certain that they already referred to it in the past tense.

It is hard not to lose patience with scholars like Sir William Ramsay, Pictures of the Apostolic Church, p. 310 who called this snake “harmless,” saying, “It was not , as Luke calls it, a viper, which does not occur on Malta.”

As F. F. Bruce said, “The objections that have been advanced, that there are now no vipers in the island, and only one place where any wood grows, are too trivial to notice.”

A. C. Hervey, The Pulpit commentary, Acts, ii, p. 319 pointed out, “The population density of Malta is now over 1200 people to the square mile,” and this alone accounts for the disappearance of vipers from Malta.

“Justice . . .” A. C. Hervey, Ibid said, “That the islanders referred to the goddess Justice as, Justilia, the daughter and successor of Zeus, and the avenger of crime.”

Verses 5-6

The intelligence and understanding of such native peoples as those of Malta make it impossible to believe that they were mistaken regarding the deadly nature of the snake that bit Paul.

“Shook the creature off into the fire . . .” Burning the viper alive appeared to Paul as a suitable form of extermination; and none of the people who had to contend with such reptiles complained of it.

“Changed their minds . . . said he was a god . . .” This is a strange reversal of what had happened at Lystra (14:12ff), where Paul was first hailed as a god, and later stoned. The carnal man loves extremes, either worshiping himself in the person of his heroes, or by killing those who do not conform to his prejudices.

Before leaving this, we cannot resist including the homely comment of J. W. McGarvey, *Commentary on Acts*, p. 275, “Paul was not a preacher after the style of a modern clergyman, who is particular not to soil his hands with menial labor, expects everybody to be ready to serve him, while he preserves his dignity and looks on.”

Verse 7-9

“Leading man of the island . . . Publius . . . entertained us.” If this refers to the entire 276 survivors, it would probably mean that many of the population opened their homes to the shipwrecked; Luke is speaking of Paul’s company and the centurion and ship’s officers, which is not likely, then it would appear that Publius himself entertained them.

“Fever and dysentery . . .” Malta fever is a malady known in the United States at the present time, caused by, drinking infected milk. The word “dysentery” is a strict medical term used by the physician Luke.

Paul . . . healed him . . .” Thus Publius’ kindness was repaid. In being able to work such a wonder, Paul verified the truth of Jesus’ promise that His apostles should suffer no hurt from deadly serpents, and that they should lay hands on the sick and recover them. J. R. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, p. 852 noted, “Here we have first-hand evidence of a competent medical witness to the reality of Paul’s miraculous cures.”

We agree with E. H. Trenchard, *A New Testament Commentary*, p. 338 that, “Although Luke does not mention preaching and conversions, the analogy of the Ephesian ministry . . . suggests that miracles always opened the way for the Word.”

Verse 10

“Honored” here were not “honorariums” as understood today, not gifts at all, but honors of public favor, expressed in many ways. Alexander Campbell, *Acts of Apostles*, p. 185 said, “Paul did not receive any remuneration for the exercise of his gift of healing . . . (which) would have been at variance with the command of Christ, (Mark 10:8). This is proved by the contrast with material gifts placed on board the ship for the benefit of all.

Verse 11

The ship of Alexandria was more fortunate than the first, for it had made the port of Malta and waited till spring to depart, or at least till the most dangerous part of the winter was past.

“At the end of three months . . .” This would still have been somewhat early for Mediterranean sailing vessels; but the relatively short part of their voyage remaining, coupled with the probability of an early spring, as it would appear, about the middle of February.

“The Twin Brothers . . .” The Greek word here is “the Dioscuri,” the mythical twin sons of Jupiter, pagan deities also called Castor and Pollux, and honored especially by sailors. The constellation Gemini is named for them, being one of the twelve sectors of the sky identified with the signs of the zodiac.

Verses 12-13

“We sailed around . . .” indicates that the voyage from Syracuse to Rhegium required sailing in a circle due to the direction of the wind. Rhegium is “the modern Reggio di Calabria on the toe of Italy.” (G. H. C. MacGregor, *op. cit.*, p. 345) and “thus at the eastern extremity of the Strait of Massena, site of the famed rock of Scylla and the whirlpool of Charybdis.” (J. R. Dummelow, *op. cit.*, p. 853)

“A south wind sprang up . . .” This was exactly the break they needed, for Puteoli is due north of Rhegium, and the final leg of the voyage was quickly made in a little over a day.

“Puteoli . . .” was a regular port of entry for the fleet of grain ships operating between Rome and Egypt, and was in those days a seaport of great importance.

Don D. Welt, *Acts Made Actual*, p. 339 said, “Just eight miles Northwest of Naples, it was the greatest port in Italy. The large pier had twenty-five arches, of which thirteen ruined ones remain.”

At Puteoli, “now Puzzuoli,” where frequently “the whole population” went out to welcome the arrival of the wheat ships, Paul and his companions left the ship, accompanied of course, by the centurion Julius and his command, with the purpose of continuing the final part of the trip by land.

Verse 14

In the seven days waiting in Puteoli it is possible, but not certain of course, but probable, that Julius himself might have become a Christian. Certainly, something induced him to honor the request of the Christians in Puteoli for Paul to remain with them over a Sunday in order to observe the Lord’s Supper with them.

Orrin Root, *Acts*, p. 202 said, “Thus Paul and his party would be the Christians at the Lord’s table on the Lord’s Day, as they had been at Troas and at Tyre.” There can hardly be any doubt that all three instances of these seven-day periods of waiting were caused by the Apostle Paul’s arrival on a Monday, in each case, and that a week’s delay was necessary to afford the opportunity of taking the Lord’s Supper on the Lord’s Day. In this fact, such conceits as the Thursday observance of the Lord’s Supper, or the daily observance of the Lord’s Supper, or any departure from the apostolic observance of it “on a fixed day,” must be rejected out of hand, as being contrary to the word of the Lord.

Verses 15-16

“The market of Appius . . .” H. Leo Boles, *Commentary on Acts*, p. 436 said this place was, “forty-three miles from Rome,” and the travel of some of the saints of Rome such a distance to welcome the beloved apostle was a source of

great joy. He wrote them several years earlier of his intention of coming, but neither any of them nor Paul could have supposed that the manner of his arrival would be as it came to pass.

He entered as a prisoner, chained to a soldier, and filled with apprehension lest the brethren might be ashamed of his bonds. No wonder he “thanked God, and took courage.” The Lord had not forsaken him; faithful brethren stood by to cheer and welcome him.

“Three Inns . . .” was ten miles closer to Rome, indicating that some, possibly including women and children, had not traveled as rapidly as others. One should read the last chapter of Romans in connection with this welcome scene, wondering if some of the names there might not have been those of persons appearing here.

This place was no better than the Market of Appius, both of them being typical commercial stops between the port of Puteoli and the “eternal city.”

Verse 17

As Paul always did, he addressed himself to the Jews “first” (Romans 1:16); and the mention of this having been after “three days” suggests that the three days had been required for getting him settled in his quarters and perhaps visiting with personal friends, of whom he had many in Rome.

As one appealing to Caesar, Paul might naturally have been supposed by the Jews in Rome to have been appealing against Jews; but it was the other way around. Paul was appealing against Roman courts to which the Jews had delivered him, and by their protests had prevented his acquittal.

“From Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans . . .” How could Paul say that the Jews had delivered him to the Romans, when it was a Roman Lysias, who had first arrested him? Both Felix and Festus would have released Paul, except for Jewish protests against it.

Verses 18-19

Paul made no mention of the repeated attempts against his life, aided and abetted by the high priest himself. It was the protest of the Jews that led Festus to withhold from Paul the liberty which was his right.

Verse 20

“For the sake of the hope of Israel . . . “ Everett F. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 488 said, “By this, Paul meant that the Christian faith was the true fulfillment of the hope of God’s people.”

“Wearing this chain . . .” J. W. McGarvey, *op. cit.*, p. 287 observed that, “Paul remained chained day and night, the guard being changed according to uniform custom every three hours, unless an exception was made of the sleeping hours in this case.” The chain itself was a strong, relatively light one, fastened on one end to Paul’s arm, and to the soldier on the other.

Verses 21-22

Verse 21 signals the end of any prosecution whatever against Paul in Rome, leading inevitably to his release from this first imprisonment.

As to why the Sanhedrin decided not to send any charges, this was due to a number of possible reasons, any one of which was more than enough:

- (1) Only recently, the Jews had been expelled from Rome, and although the ban had by this time been relaxed, the Jerusalem hierarchy would have been loathe to open old wounds.
- (2) Having already failed miserably to convince the lower courts of Felix and Festus, they knew they had no case worthy of the name.
- (3) They had, at that time, no powerful advocate in Rome who could have aided their plea. “The date here is 60 A. D., two years prior to Poppaea Sabina’s marriage to Nero. (F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 530)
- (4) They were as beavers with the intrigues leading to the outbreak of the Jewish war.

- (5) They could also count on Paul's being held in; prison for two more years without any charges being pressed by them; and they could have taken that option of keeping him in prison.

G. H. C. MacGreggor, *op. cit.*, p. 349 said, "There is some evidence that if the prosecution failed to put in an appearance within two years, they lost their case by default."

Paul was doubtless pleased with the indication that no further appearance of his old enemies from Jerusalem could be expected else they would already have appeared. It was an additional bonus that the leaders of the Jews in Rome decided to hear his arguments on behalf of Christianity and promptly set a date.

ISRAEL'S FINAL REJECTION

Verse 23

This was a long and thorough presentation by Paul, in which he doubtless covered all of the arguments previously recorded by Luke in Acts. The exposition went on "from morning until evening."

Verse 24

Here occurred what always occurs when the gospel is preached: men are polarized with reference to it, some believing, some not believing. (2 Corinthians 2:15-16)

Verse 25a

What, therefore, is that "one word" which broke up this meeting? Luke had already related how the temple mob heard Paul patiently until a single word, the word "Gentiles" (22:21-22), the strong likelihood being that it was exactly that same word which signaled the end of the meeting here.

Verses 25b-27

This quote is from Isaiah 6:9-10; and although spoken "through" Isaiah, it is clearly presented here as the word of the Holy Spirit.

This same passage applied by Christ, as affirmed in all four gospels (Matthew 13:13-15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; and John 12:37-41. The significance of its being

repeated here lies in that fact that the same blindness that closed Israel's hearts to Christ, was still operative in closing their hearts against the gospel.

Paul already had the most extensive knowledge of that self-induced blindness to the truth on the part of the chosen people, but he had no doubt hoped until now that some change in the pattern might have come to pass in Rome. The interview just concluded blasted any such hopes.

Up until this time, Paul had ever gone "to the Jew first," but in the light of this final rejection in the heart of civilization, he promptly announced in the next verse the termination of that phase of Christianity.

Verse 28

In this, the book of Acts reaches a magnificent climax; rejection on the part of secular Israel, unlimited and glorious success among the Gentiles. This, however, is not the only climax, because the undeniable implication of Paul's innocence, as proved by the absence of any charges against him in Rome, implies that his freedom was expected momentarily.

Verses 30-31

Two full years . . ." Luke had just revealed that no letters or charges of any kind had been received from Judaea; and any case before the emperor which was not prosecuted in two years was judged to be defaulted, this indicates an air of expectancy that the release might come any day.

"His own rented quarters . . ." Here again the question of Paul's undeniable financial ability comes to mind, but we have no certain solution. Luke may very well have been wealthy; or Paul himself, as Ramsay believed, might have inherited wealth.

"Welcoming all who came to him . . ." Paul reached to all comers; and there soon were "saints in Caesar's household." Intended by the Jews as a frustration of Paul's efforts, keeping him imprisoned for two years without charge, his imprisonment actually helped the gospel. (Philippians 1:12)

"Preaching the kingdom of God . . ." G. H. C. MacGreggor, *op. cit.*, p. 328 said, "This comes near to being a synonym for the Christian church.

“With all openness, unhindered” Safe from any efforts to assassinate him, Paul preached fearlessly and boldly to all who came near; and, in addition to those who came to him, he had a new prospect every three hours, every time the guard was changed.

During the two full years mentioned here, A. C. Hervey, *op. cit.*, p. 325 said, “Paul wrote the epistle to the Ephesians, the epistle to the Colossians, and those to Philemon and the Philippians.”