

Acts of the Apostles Notes and Commentary



Areopagus from the Acropolis (Athens) ajbear AKA KiltBear <http://www.flickr.com/photos/ajbear/>

By Jim Wilsford

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1. The Acts of the Apostles: Introduction

The Acts of the Apostles begins with Luke restating the purpose of his former book, *The Gospel According to Luke*.

Acts 1:1-2

1 In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach 2 until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.

The instructions that the Lord gave were to his apostles—eleven in number, with the death of Judas. This focus on the apostles becomes more important, since in modern times, powers given only to them are widely ascribed to others. The empowerment of modern ecclesiastical hierarchies comes directly from efforts through the centuries to usurp these powers and authorities given only to the apostles of Christ.

Convincing Proofs of the Resurrection of Christ

Luke describes the empirical nature of Christ's appearance after his resurrection and his giving of many convincing proofs.

Acts 1:3

3 After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive.

Luke spoke of these same empirical proofs in Luke 1:1-2: "1 Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word." Christ showed himself and eyewitnesses saw. In 1 Cor 15:3-8, Paul summarized the power and nature of this eyewitness testimony upon which the truth of the resurrection stands:

3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

In addition to Paul, Peter and John claimed the power of eyewitness testimony as convincing proofs of the resurrection of the Son of God. Peter wrote in 2 Peter 1:16-18:

16 We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." 18 We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

John agreed with Peter and Paul in establishing the convincing proofs of eyewitness testimony

in 1 John 1:1-3:

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. 2 The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. 3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us.

When discussing the proofs of the resurrection, Luke claims certainty in his “convincing proofs.” In Luke 1:3-4, he wrote:

3 Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 so that you may know the **certainty of the things** you have been taught [Emphasis added].

In all human affairs, proofs achieve three levels of credibility: It is *possible* that the Jesus rose from the dead. It is *probable* that Jesus rose from the dead. It is *certain* that Jesus rose from the dead. In Luke 24, Luke adds his own accumulation of witnesses to testify that Christ rose from the dead.

The Lord Appears and Opens the Scriptures to the Apostles

To all these witnesses, the Lord himself called on the power of the prophets to prove of a certainty that he who was dead is now alive. Luke recorded his words in Luke 24:25-27:

25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

Two men on the road to Emmaus were eyewitness to his appearance and to the fact that he had opened the scriptures to them. In Luke 24:30-32, he eats with them:

30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. 32 They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

In Luke 24:45-49, the Lord again opened the minds of the apostles so that they could understand the scriptures. In these few words, he defined the gospel—his death and resurrection—and told them the mission to come—repentance and the remission of sins to be preached by his authority to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. 46 He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Significantly, Jesus said, “You are witnesses of these things.”

Luke Documents a Number of Eyewitnesses as Convincing Proof

Luke 24 documents a number of eyewitnesses who stand as contemporary and convincing proof that Jesus rose from the dead. In Luke 24:5-8, the angels testify of his resurrection to the women who had brought spices to his tomb:

"Why do you look for the living among the dead? 6 He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 7 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" 8 Then they remembered his words.

These women—three named with others unnamed--were enough witnesses to establish the certainty of the event. They related the news to the apostles who remained skeptical about the certainty of the event. Luke recorded in Luke 24:9-11

9 When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. 10 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. 11 But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.

They thought what the women said was nonsense, not accepting even the possibility of the truth of the resurrection. Peter was provoked to wonder what had happen when he saw the empty tomb and strips of linen in Luke 24:12: "12 Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened." Nonsense turns to *possibility*.

Luke 24:13-32 is a narrative of the appearance of Christ to two disciples where *possibility* of the resurrection turns to *probability*. In verses 13-16, Jesus appears to them, but they are kept from recognizing him. In verses 19 to 24, they discuss with the Lord the *possibility* of the resurrection of the Lord, concluding their account of the events with the women and Peter by saying,

"22 In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning 23 but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. 24 Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

In the verses following this episode, the two witnesses came to understand the certain truth of Jesus' resurrection. First, Jesus conveyed the teaching of the prophets in verses 25-27:

25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

Second, Jesus opened their eyes and they recognized him in verses 30-32:

30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. 32 They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

It is with these events that the two disciples become *certain* of the resurrection of Jesus, for when they return to the apostles, they say in Luke 24:34, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon."

Here, Jesus appears to the apostles and provides them with empirical evidence that he is alive. Luke records this evidence in Luke 24:37-43:

37 They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. 38 He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? 39 Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

40 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. 41 And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate it in their presence.

Finally, they became actual witnesses of his ascension—an event that Luke will return to in Acts 1—recorded in Luke 24:50-53:

50 When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. 51 While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. 52 Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. 53 And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

Theme of Acts of the Apostles

These are the convincing proofs of the former book, the gospel according to Luke. Acts of the Apostles begins with these events and unfolds the gospel story as it spreads through out the world. Just as the Gospel of Luke was about what Jesus began to do and teach, so Acts of the Apostles is about what the church of the first century did and taught. A study of Acts presents convincing proofs of what the church of the 21st century must believe and practice. Acts 1 begins where Luke 24 leaves off.

2. The Apostles Wait for the Holy Spirit; Jesus Ascends; God Chooses Matthias: Acts 1

Lesson 1 reviewed the *many convincing proofs* that Christ was alive. The proofs established the certainty of Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, the central principle of the gospel. In Luke 1:3-4, Luke stated his purpose in the writing of his record of the gospel:

3 Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

Those who read the gospel account may know the certainty of the things taught. Therefore, Luke begins *The Acts of the Apostles* by leading off with the assertion that Jesus himself had given “many convincing proofs that he was alive.” Acts begins with a recitation of these important events in *The Gospel According to Luke*.

Acts 1:1-3

1 In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach 2 until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. 3 After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

In this first paragraph of Acts, Luke further states the purpose of the gospel. He had written about all that Jesus began to do and to teach. In this introduction to Acts, Luke summarizes the facts of the gospel. Jesus was taken up into heaven. His instructions were to the apostles and made certain by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Jesus, who had suffered death on the cross, appeared to men, proving that he was alive. Finally, Luke says that during the forty days after the resurrection, Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God.

The purpose of Acts is to chronicle the facts of the establishment and spread of the kingdom of God—literally what the apostles did and taught as a result of Jesus’ command in Luke 24:44-49:

44 He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. 46 He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Baptized with the Holy Spirit

Acts 1:4-5

4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

This passage in Acts is parallel to Luke 24:49. Both speak of the promised gift from God. In Luke 24:49, the gift is a clothing of power from on high; in Luke 1:5, it is a baptism of the Holy

Spirit. Therefore, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is the clothing of power from on high. In both instances, the promise was given exclusively to the apostles. Modern teachings on the baptism of the Holy Spirit are mostly without scriptural foundation and are unscriptural in content and intent. One will read nothing of these modern concepts and practices in *The Acts of the Apostles*. There will be no supernatural demonstrations of power in a direct operation of the Holy Spirit in conversion in order to demonstrate salvation.

Baptized, as used here, takes its original meaning. W. E. Vines defines baptize as literally a dipping or an immersing, and metaphorically as an overwhelming:

Baptize: "to baptize," primarily a frequentative form of bapto, "to dip," was used among the Greeks to signify the dyeing of a garment, or the drawing of water by dipping a vessel into another, etc. Plutarchus uses it of the drawing of wine by dipping the cup into the bowl (Alexis, 67) and Plato, metaphorically, of being overwhelmed with questions (Euthydemus, 277 D). (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.)

In the sense here, baptizing is an overwhelming of the Holy Spirit; or as stated by the Lord in Luke 24:49, it is a clothing. In the Greek language, the word used here gives the same meaning literally and metaphorically as baptized. Strong defines it this way: NT:1746

enduo (en-doo'-o); from NT:1722 and NT:1416 (in the sense of sinking into a garment); to invest with clothing (literally or figuratively):

KJV - array, clothe (with), endue, have (put) on.

(Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright © 1994, 2003, 2006 Biblesoft, Inc. and International Bible Translators, Inc.)

This endowment of the Holy Spirit was not only special to the apostles, but it was also special to the generation of those living at this time. Jesus had foretold the clothing with power from on high. He also foretold that it would be in the lifetime of his listeners, not in the lifetime of generations to follow. In Matt 16:28, he said, "28 I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." In Mark 9:1, he said, "9 And he said to them, 'I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.'"

When the power from on high came, the apostles, and only the apostles were overwhelmed with it, and at the same time, the kingdom of God came. To these apostles, everything would be fulfilled, just as the Lord had said in Luke 24:44, "44 He said to them, 'This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.'"

Acts: 1:6-8

6 So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

In this account, the apostles are bewildered, thinking that the talk of the kingdom of God meant the restoration of the physical kingdom to Israel. The Lord chose this time to pinpoint

the time of the coming of the power to them. It would be at the time when the Holy Spirit was to come on them. Now, we know that these events happened on the Day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. The kingdom that will unfold is a spiritual kingdom—the Israel of God. Paul wrote in Gal 6:15-16: “15 Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. 16 Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.” This Israel of God includes all men, according to Eph 3:6: “6 This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.” There will be no earthly restoration of the kingdom of the old covenant.

Verse 8 tells them to wait in Jerusalem to receive the power when the Holy Spirit would come upon them. Thus far the Lord has told them where the Kingdom would come—Jerusalem, how it would come—with power from on high, and to what extent it would come—they would be overwhelmed. The apostles will have no trouble recognizing this great and glorious day of the Lord of Acts 2:20.

In this section, Luke concludes with the Lord giving the order of the progress of the gospel. He said, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” *The Acts of the Apostles* will trace this progression of the gospel and the growth of the kingdom of God

The Ascension of Jesus

Luke 1:9-11

9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

This passage gives the basic facts of the ascension and return of Jesus; that is, he will return the same way as they saw him leave. This is a reiteration of Luke 24:50-53 but with more detail:

50 When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. 51 While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. 52 Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. 53 And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

The manner of Jesus’ return is the subject of two passages by Paul. Nowhere do they mention the return of Jesus to the earth, which, according to Peter, will have its very elements burned with fervent heat. First, in 1 Thess 4:15-17, Paul said that we would meet him in the air to forever be with the Lord:

15 According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. **And so we will be with the Lord forever.** [Emphasis added]

There is no room in this passage for a return of the Lord to an earthly kingdom. Neither is there room for such an earthly kingdom in Paul's writing to the Corinthians. In 1 Cor 15:20, 23-24, Paul gave the order of events from the resurrection of Christ to the end:

20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep . . . 23 But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.

Again, there is no room in this passage for an earthly kingdom at some later time. The very same is true of Paul's teaching in 1 Cor 15:50-53:

50 I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

Not only is there no room for an earthly kingdom in this sequence of events, but there is also no room for "flesh and blood" to inherit the kingdom of God. Paul's description exactly fits what Jesus said in Matt 24:27, 30-31:

27 For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

30 "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

Peter makes it clear that this earth and the elements therein will be destroyed (melt in heat) in 2 Peter 3:10-13

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives 12 as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

From the very beginning of Luke's chronicles of the events of Acts, the kingdom of God, which comes in chapter 2, on the day of Pentecost, with the overwhelming power of the Holy Spirit, is the spiritual kingdom of God.

The Adding of Matthias to the Eleven

Acts 1:12-14

12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. 13 When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of

Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. 14 They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

The focus of this section of Acts 1 is on the apostles and the replacement of Judas with Matthias. This group appears to be a narrow group of the eleven apostles, certain women, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. The eleven returning shows that the promises of the overwhelming of the Holy Spirit and the promised power from on high were to the apostles and the apostles alone. The passage will turn to the manner of selecting a successor to Judas—a matter ignored or perverted by many churches today—the Roman and Orthodox Catholic churches, the Anglican and Episcopal churches, and the Mormon church, to name most but not all. The passage makes it impossible to have apostles beyond the lives of the original apostles, leaving those who practice apostolic succession to their own reasoning to justify it. As the practice of apostolic succession falls, so the practice that church tradition is binding on Christians in past and future generations falls.

Acts 1:15-17

15 In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) 16 and said, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus— 17 he was one of our number and shared in this ministry."

Before a group of 120 believers, Peter began to rehearse that the prophecy of scripture called for Judas' replacement. It is interesting that Peter says that the Holy Spirit spoke. A few verses later, it was David who actually spoke the words of the Holy Spirit, in keeping with Peter's later teaching in 2 Peter 1:20-21,

20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:18-20

18 (With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. 19 Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

20 "For," said Peter, "it is written in the book of Psalms,

"*'May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,'*

and,

"*'May another take his place of leadership.'*

After the parenthetical description of Judas death, Peter quotes the prophecies. The prophecies conclude with the statement, "May another take his place of leadership." The authority for the replacement of and the method of replacement is binding teaching of the Holy Spirit and consistent with all the scriptures dealing with the apostles.

Acts 1:21-26

21 Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection."

23 So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. 24 Then

they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen 25 to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs." 26 Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

The qualifications were clear: ". . . one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection." This qualification rules out the choosing of anyone to be an apostle in the ages following the lives of eyewitnesses to Christ from the beginning to the resurrection of Christ. The purpose of this selection was also limited by scripture to one to take Judas' place. The manner of the selection process is made more certain by Peter's prayer, "Show us which of these two **you have chosen** 25 to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs." The apostolic ministry was only that of Judas, and God chose the replacement.

The only other instance of adding an apostle was that of the apostle Paul, who wrote of his selection as an apostle in 1 Cor 15:8-11

8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

9 For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

These choices—adding Matthias and choosing Paul—exclude any other cases of selecting apostles. Even the apostle, James, whom Herod put to death in Acts 12:1-3, was not replaced.

As with Matthias, Paul was chosen by God. Luke recorded Ananias saying in Acts 22:14-16:

14 "Then he said: 'The God of our fathers **has chosen you** to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. 15 You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'"

Apostolic succession, as practiced by denominations, is not a doctrine of scripture. The words, *apostolic succession*, do not appear in the scriptures. Those who practice the doctrine make no pretense. They did not trust the scriptures, and so they invented a human scheme in order to rely on men. This scheme of *apostolic succession* permitted another scheme—tradition as equally binding as scriptures on the church. One of their own writers claims the purpose for the doctrine:

The first Christians had no doubts about how to determine which was the true Church and which doctrines the true teachings of Christ. The test was simple: Just trace the apostolic succession of the claimants. Apostolic succession is the line of bishops stretching back to the apostles. All over the world, *all Catholic bishops are part of a lineage that goes back to the time of the apostles*, something that is impossible in Protestant denominations (most of which do not even claim to have bishops). Catholic Answers, "The Divinity of Christ" (San Diego: Catholic Answers, 2001)

This same article shows their blatant disregard of the scriptures:

Thus the early Church historian J. N. D. Kelly, a Protestant, writes, "[W]here in practice was [the] apostolic testimony or tradition to be found? . . . The most obvious answer was that the apostles had committed it orally to the Church, where it had been handed down from generation to generation. . . . Unlike the alleged secret tradition of the Gnostics, it was entirely public and open, having been entrusted by the apostles to

their successors, and by these in turn to those who followed them, and was visible in the Church for all who cared to look for it" (*Early Christian Doctrines*, 37). (ibid).

Their claim is that these are "Spirit-endowed men who have been vouchsafed 'an infallible charism of truth'" (*Early Christian Doctrines*, 43)

These foundation doctrines—apostolic Succession, tradition, equal to scripture, and infallibility of bishops—have allowed the great perversion of scripture that is the great apostasy, which in turn, has created all the denominations. The words of the apostle Paul in Acts 20:28-31 have been fulfilled:

28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. 29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31 So be on your guard!

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) holds a view of apostolic succession. To them, apostolic succession came back to the church when Joseph Smith, Jr., led its restoration in the nineteenth century. LDS maintains that Joseph Smith, whom they maintain was visited by God, the father and his Son, had the power of particular and general revelation.

While the New Testament embraces the power of particular and general revelation for the apostles and prophets, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is unique for believing general revelation is active today - and held by the apostles of their Church. [These notes on LDS rely on the websites, *Wikipedia* and *Executable Manuscripts*.].

Apostolic succession and latter day infallibility doctrines deny the clear teaching of the all-sufficiency of the scriptures. Paul taught in 2 Tim 3:16-17: "16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Conclusion

Lesson 2, covering Acts 1, ends with the selection Matthias to take the place of Judas among the eleven. Lesson three will cover Acts 2 where power will come from on high and the kingdom of will come with power, just as the Lord Jesus said it would.

3. The Holy Spirit Comes with Power; This Is What Was Spoken: Acts 2:1-21

Acts chapter 2 opens with the apostles obeying the Lord's command and waiting in Jerusalem. Luke recorded these commands in Luke 24:45-49:

45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. 46 He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 I am going to send you what my Father has promised; **but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.**" [Emphasis added].

Acts 2 will follow faithfully the events forecast in this passage by Luke: Peter will teach the death, burial, resurrection of the gospel, and he will preach repentance and forgiveness of men. The apostles will be in Jerusalem until they receive the promised power from on high.

In Acts 1:4-5, Luke again recorded the Lord telling the apostles what was going to happen and what they were to do:

4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for **the gift my Father promised**, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be **baptized with the Holy Spirit.**" [Emphasis added].

The final verse of chapter 1 gives the antecedent to *they* of the first verse of chapter 2: "26 Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to **the eleven apostles.**" [Emphasis added]. As Acts 1 made clear, the apostles were the only ones to whom Christ promised this clothing of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit Comes with Power

Acts 2:1-4

1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Jesus had promised the apostles an immersion, a clothing (endowment), of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit came, his coming was clear to the senses of all who witnessed. The sound was like a violent wind from heaven. Since it filled the entire house, all could hear it. They all saw what was like tongues of fire. In the meaning of the grammar, the Spirit came to rest on the apostles; for the antecedent of *them* is still the word, *apostles*, of Acts 1:26. It is clear that the Holy Spirit enabled only the apostles, who were here endowed with the Holy Spirit. Others could only receive individual gifts, by the laying on the apostles' hands. Today, many believe the baptism of the Holy Spirit was universally given, contrary to the teaching of any scripture.

The Power of the Holy Spirit—Limited and Temporary

That this measure of the Holy Spirit, given only to the apostles, was not universally given is clear in Acts 8:14-19 where the converts could not receive even spiritual gifts until the apostles

laid their hands on them:

14 When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. 15 When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, 16 because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

18 When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money 19 and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

These new Christians receive the gift of the Holy Spirit as a result of their conversion, but they did not receive a specific spiritual gift as a part of their conversion. It was by the laying on of an apostle's hands that they receive the latter. Simon knew that the real power was the ability to pass on a spiritual gift. This measure of the Holy Spirit—the ability to perform spiritual gifts by the laying on of the apostles' hands—receives one of the most detailed explanations in the New Testament, covering three entire chapters in 1 Cor 12, 13, and 14. The exclusive powers of the apostles—the baptism of the Holy Spirit—ended when they died. The exclusive power of those early Christians—individual spiritual gifts—ended when these first century Christians, upon whom the apostles laid their hands, died. The end of spiritual gifts is expressly taught in 1 Cor 13:8-10:

But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.

That perfection is, of course, the scriptures that equip us for every good work. Paul wrote in 2 Tim 3:16-17:

16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

James agreed that we have a perfect law in James 1:25, "25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it — he will be blessed in what he does."

In order to justify the false teaching that tongues and miracles exist today, many pervert the teaching of 1 Cor 13:8-9. Some claim that *perfection* means the Christ, who is perfect; others claim that *perfection* means heaven, which is perfect. The word translated *perfection* in the NIV is an adjective not a noun. W. E. Vine defines the word in this way:

PERFECT

1. teleios. . . It is used thus . . . 1 Cor 13:10 (referring to the complete revelation of God's will and ways, whether in the completed Scriptures or in the hereafter); (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.)

Both the KJV and ASV versions translate the word as an adjective and with the clause, ". . . when *that which is perfect* is come. . ." The passage is not referring to Christ, for then it would read, "When he who is perfect is come." Christ cannot be *that which*. The passage is not referring to heaven, for Paul said in the last verse, 1 Cor 13:13, "13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." When heaven comes, faith will give way to certainty, assurance, and sight. Heb 11:1 teaches, "11 Now faith is being sure of

what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." When the perfection of heaven comes, faith will become reality. Likewise, when heaven comes, hope will no longer exist, for hope will be realized. Paul wrote in Rom 8:24-25, "24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently." When the perfection of heaven comes, our hope will be realized. If faith, hope, and love remain, Paul cannot be speaking of heaven.

Therefore, the overwhelming endowment of the Holy Spirit came only to the apostles on the Day of Pentecost. The individual gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as tongues, healings, prophecy, came only to the disciples on whom the apostles laid their hands. This intervention of the Holy Spirit ended with the lives of those so endowed in the 1st century.

As the Apostles Speak, the Listeners Hear in Their Own Languages

Acts 2:5-11

5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. 6 When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. 7 Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? 8 Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome 11 (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs – we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"

In verse 4, Luke had told how the apostles spoke in other tongues, "4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." In verse 5, Luke said that there were Jews from "every nation under heaven." This fulfills the express statement of Jesus, "47 And repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

What is happening here is not gibberish, nor is it one single language; but each one heard in his own language. They were so amazed that they said, "We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues." People from all over the world were present. As these people returned to the far reaches of Asia and Asia Minor, Africa, Europe, Mesopotamia, and the entire Arab world, they must have taken the gospel message with them; and their trade routes could have reasonably taken the message even farther.

Acts 2:12-13

12 Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

13 Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

Some who heard were amazed and perplexed, others were mocking. The group of the amazed and perplexed asked the first important question of the day, "What does this mean?" Beginning in verse 14 Peter answers this and other important questions about this glorious day.

This Is What Was Spoken

Acts 2:14

14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. 15 These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning!"

Peter first clears the air on the apostles' mental state. It is just too early in the morning for them to be drunk. He makes two important points to start with: let me explain this to you and listen carefully to what I say. He begins by quoting the prophet Joel.

Acts 2:16-21

16 *No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:*

17 *"In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.*

18 *Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.*

19 *I will show wonders in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.*

20 *The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.*

21 *And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.'*

The phrase *this is what* makes certain that the prophecy of Joel was being fulfilled before their very eyes. Joel had foretold the signs and wonders of the day, but most importantly he named the day when all that they had just witnessed would come to pass as the great and glorious day of the Lord. The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ was the beginning of these last days, as signified by the rent of the veil of the temple from top to bottom in Matt 27:51-54:

51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. 52 The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. 53 They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

54 When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"

The Old Testament passed away, as described in Col 2:13-15:

. . . God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

The New Testament took effect, as described in Heb 8:6, 8-10, 12, 13:

6 But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which

he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.

8 But God found fault with the people and said:

"The time is coming, declares the Lord,
when I will make a new covenant
with the house of Israel
and with the house of Judah.

10 This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel

12 For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more."

13 By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

The rest of Acts will chronicle, among many other important events, the signs and miracles that followed the apostles and those that believed.

The Great and Glorious Day of the Lord

In naming this day of Pentecost the great and glorious day of the Lord, Joel signified that the kingdom of God came on that day, as foretold by Christ, Joel, and Isaiah. Jesus had taught that it would come in lifetime of those living in Matt 16:28, "28 I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." Not only did Peter say, "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel, but Joel said that the great and glorious day of the Lord would be when deliverance went forth from Jerusalem in Joel 2:32:

for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem
there will be deliverance,
as the Lord has said,
among the survivors
whom the Lord calls.

Isaiah also pinpointed this time and place in Isa 2:2-3:

2 In the last days
the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established
as chief among the mountains;
it will be raised above the hills,
and all nations will stream to it.

3 Many peoples will come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths."
The law will go out from Zion,

the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

Many people fail to see that this day marks the forward march of citizens in Christ's kingdom. In sincerity, many fail to see that Christ was raised to sit at God's right hand in his kingdom, and they still wait for that day when Christ comes to reign in an earthly kingdom, which they believe is yet to come. However, Paul wrote of the kingdom come in the past tense in Eph 1:19-23, relating it to this very day – the day upon which his church and kingdom came to all mankind:

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

From this great and glorious day of the Lord, in Jerusalem, the kingdom and the church become synonymous in describing God's people: First, we are citizens in the kingdom and second, as called out from the world, we are members of his church, which is his body, over which he is head.

Failure to see this day as in the last days and this day as the great and glorious day of the Lord has led to all sorts of millennial theories – too numerous to discuss here. However, from this great and glorious day when Christ came in his kingdom, until the very end of the last days, there is only one other great day – the last day. The last day is the great and dreadful day of the Lord. Malachi prophesied of that day in the very last verse of the Old Testament, Mal 4:5-6:

5 "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. 6 He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."

The great and dreadful day of the Lord is the judgment day, described by Paul as the day of the Lord in 1 Thess 5:1-3:

1 Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, 2 for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

Peter also described this day of the Lord in 2 Peter 3:10: "10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare."

The last days began with the advent of the kingdom of Christ on the day of Pentecost and it will end at the Day of Judgment, and the deliverance of the kingdom to the Father. 1 Cor 15:22-26 teaches:

22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Calling on the Name of the Lord

The last verse in the passage from Joel, quoted by Peter, speaks to the salvation available on this great and glorious day of the Lord. Joel said, and Peter quoted, in Act 2:21, "21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Christ had promised this salvation in what we call the great commission in Mk 16:16: "16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." In the next section of Peter's sermon, he will tell those who ask, "Brothers, what shall we do?" exactly what to do to be saved. In spite of the specific teaching of Jesus, Peter, Paul and the rest of the inspired writers, many seize on this statement by Joel and say that all you have to do is call on the name of the Lord in order to be saved. These ignore the teachings on repentance, confession, and baptism as commands to be obeyed in order to be saved. The scriptures that follow explain in detail what one must do to call "on the name of the Lord."

Paul began with this same quotation from Joel in Rom 10:12-13, "12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13 for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"

Just previous to quoting Joel, Paul explained the necessity of belief in the Lord and of confession of the Lord in order to call on the name of the Lord. Paul begins in Rom 10:9-10 conditioning salvation on belief and confession:

9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

In Rom 10:13, Paul quotes Joel as cited above. In Rom 10:14, he conditions *calling on the name of Lord* and therefore, salvation on hearing and believing:

14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

A man called Ananius told Paul what to do to be saved in Acts 22:16, "16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name." Since *calling* is a present participle, it marks a time which begins at the time of the main verb and continues through the action of the main verb. In this case, *calling* begins with *get up, be baptized* and continues through the action of these main verbs.

From these scriptures, one sees that *calling on the name of the Lord* begins with the preaching of the word, the hearing of the word, the believing of the word and believing in Christ, resolving to go forward (get up), confessing the name of the Lord, and being baptized. This same gospel plan will be repeated in every conversion in the Book of Acts as those who hear the word call on the name of the Lord and are saved.

4. Peter Preaches the Gospel: Acts 2:22-36

Peter's sermon had begun with the quotation from the prophet Joel in Acts 2:17-21. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on this day of Pentecost was what Joel had spoken of in his prophecy. In the preceding verses, Peter used this prophecy to establish the time and place from which the kingdom of God would begin—from Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, after Christ's death. The time was when the Holy Spirit came with power in Acts 2:1-13. The place was from Mount Zion in Jerusalem in Joel 2:32. Isaiah used the same words as Joel in Isa 2:3—*last days*—to identify the time. The place, from which the kingdom would go, according to

Isaiah, was also Zion and Jerusalem.

Peter Preaches the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Christ

In this sermon, Peter will lay out the facts of the gospel; will establish that Jesus is now sitting on the throne of his father David; and will convict the Jews guilty of the murder of Jesus.

Jesus Accredited by God

Acts 2:22

22 "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know."

Peter addresses the audience as men of Israel, identifying them as people whose entire heritage and teaching have led them to this great and glorious day of the Lord. They had full knowledge of the prophecies of Joel and Isaiah. Peter told them that God accredited Jesus, that is, gave him official authorization and approval. This approval and authorization came in the form of miracles, wonders, and signs which the Lord actually performed among them. They were, then, eyewitnesses to this accreditation by God. Those who were described as amazed and perplexed men, and who asked one another, "What does this mean?" in Acts 2:12, would know the certainty of this accreditation. 12

The power of the miracles, wonders, and signs, which Jesus had done and which those on this day remembered, established the authenticity of Peter's claims. John had stated the purpose in John 20:30-31:

30 Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

By the miraculous signs, men of all ages may be certain that Jesus is the Christ.

The Facts of the Gospel

Acts 2:23-24

23 This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. 24 But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

What has happened to the Lord, Jesus, and what is happening on this day of Pentecost, is according to the set purpose and foreknowledge of God. Many contend that Jesus failed to establish his (earthly) kingdom, and will return at some future date to do so. To these people, the church is a substitute for God's failed attempt to establish his kingdom on earth. The very idea that God, almighty, and the Lord, Jesus Christ, would fail at what they purposed is beyond comprehension. Peter clearly taught that what happened to Jesus was "by God's set purpose and foreknowledge." Paul described God's eternal purpose in Eph 1:9-10:

9 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

This fulfillment of God's eternal purpose was forecast and described by Jesus in Luke 18:31-33:

31 Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. 32 He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. 33 On the third day he will rise again."

Jesus' words, used to describe the gospel, foreshadow what Peter taught in his sermon. Also, prior to his ascension, the Lord reiterated this principle, emphasizing that "everything must be fulfilled in Luke 24:44: "44 He said to them, 'This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.'"

Paul spoke of the wisdom of God, set, but hidden, before time began, in 1 Cor 2:7-8:

7 No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that **God destined for our glory before time began**. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. [Emphasis added]

As one might say today, this is the real deal—no cheap substitutes; no failed plans. This is *the great and glorious day of the Lord* purposed before time began!

Fulfilling that eternal purpose, those present put him to death, and God raised him from the dead. Thus, Peter preached the facts of the gospel. Paul taught these same facts of the gospel in 1 Cor 15:1-5:

1 Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the **gospel** I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2 By this **gospel** you are saved, if you hold firmly to the **word I preached to you**. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ **died** for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he **was buried**, that he **was raised** on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he **appeared** [Emphasis added]

Jesus, as the approved one of God, was a proven fact, since those present were eyewitness to his miracles. Jesus, as the one God raised from the dead, was also a proven fact, established by the fulfilled prophecies and the eyewitness encounters. Peter quotes one of these prophecies from David beginning in Acts 2:25.

The Resurrection, the Fulfillment of Prophecy

Acts 2:25-28

25 *David said about him:*

'I saw the Lord always before me.

Because he is at my right hand,

I will not be shaken.

26 *Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;*

my body also will live in hope,

27 *because you will not abandon me to the grave,*

nor will you let your Holy One see decay.

28 *You have made known to me the paths of life;*

you will fill me with joy in your presence.'

The key points of David's prophecy were that God would not abandon the Christ—the Holy One—to the grave, nor would he see corruption. David prophetically voiced the consolation of the faithful, "Because you will not abandon me to the grave." Job was the first recorded voice to issue this plaintive plea in Job 19:25-27:

I know that my Redeemer lives,
and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.

26 And after my skin has been destroyed,
yet in my flesh I will see God;

27 I myself will see him
with my own eyes – I, and not another.

How my heart yearns within me!

Because Christ was raised from the dead, both Job and David will see the resurrection from the dead spoken of in their prophecies. Since Christ was raised, the faithful in Christ will be raised according to Paul in 1 Cor 15:20-26:

20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep . . . 23 But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Jesus, Sitting on David's Throne and Exalted at the Right Hand of God

Acts 2:29-33

29 "Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. 30 But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. 31 Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. 32 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. 33 Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

Peter's argument to the Jews who were listening was that they knew that David was yet in his tomb. David, as a prophet, knew that God had promised with an oath to place a descendent on his throne. David and these Jews knew that God's oath was certain. Heb 6:17-19 states this principle of certainty:

17 Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. 18 God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.

This principle—Christ will sit on the throne of David and his kingdom would go forth on this day—forever destroys the idea of some future, earthly kingdom. All the prophecies concerning the Christ and his kingdom point to this very day and hour in Acts 2. Peter has clearly asserted that Jesus is sitting on David's throne, exalted at the right hand of God, having received the promised Holy Spirit, having poured it out in what they were seeing and hearing.

The issues of Christ on the throne of David and of Christ come in his kingdom would not have to be discussed if it were not for the concocted theories of the many millennialists. Yet, from the prophets to the Revelation, Christ reigns in his kingdom from this day of Pentecost forward.

Christ on a Priestly Throne and Christ on a Kingly Throne

The prophecies of Zachariah make this truth of Christ as king in his kingdom more certain. Zech 3:8, sets the meaning of the symbol to follow, "8 Listen , O high priest Joshua and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch."

In Zech 6:12-13, Zachariah quoted the Lord Almighty:

"Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the Lord. 13 It is he who will build the temple of the Lord, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two."

The man named Branch was to build the temple of the Lord and clothed in majesty, he would sit and rule on his throne. The throne is clearly a priestly throne. However, that "there will be harmony between the two" speaks of a second throne, a kingly throne. Consider the priestly throne first.

On this day of Pentecost, Christ sat on his priestly throne in the temple of God. Heb 4:15-16 teaches that he is now high priest on his throne:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. 16 Let us then approach the **throne of grace** with confidence.

It was also on that day that the temple of the Lord was laid up from spiritual stones. Peter explains this in 1 Peter 2:4-5:

4 As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him – 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

The man called Branch was to also sit on a kingly throne. Isaiah tells who the branch is in Isa 11:1-3:

1 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
2 The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him –
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of power,
the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord –
3 and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.

Jeremiah confirmed that the branch was to be king in Jer 23:5-6:

5 "The days are coming," declares the Lord,
"when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch,

a King who will reign wisely
and do what is just and right in the land.
6 In his days Judah will be saved
and Israel will live in safety.
This is the name by which he will be called:
The Lord Our Righteousness.

The angel that spoke to Mary confirmed that Jesus would sit on the throne of David in fulfillment of these prophecies in Luke 1:29-33:

29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. 31 You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

The Christ, the King, on the Throne of David, at the Right Hand of God

Acts 2:34-35

34 *For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,*

"The Lord said to my Lord:

'Sit at my right hand

35 until I make your enemies

a footstool for your feet.' "

Peter concludes his gospel sermon by reiterating that Jesus, the Christ, sits on David's throne at the right hand of God. Fittingly, he quotes David once more to prove his point. His proof for this point was an accumulation of eyewitness testimony made the more sure by the fulfillment of these prophecies. Based on the evidence so eloquently presented, Peter makes his appeal for the audience to act.

Peter's Appeal to Israel

Acts 2:36

36 *"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."*

Peter ends his sermon with a conclusion signaled by the word *therefore*. All Israel can be assured that God has made Jesus whom they crucified both Lord and Christ. As in Heb 11:1, Peter's listeners can be "sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." This final appeal echoes Peter's confession when the Lord asked in Matt 16:15-19:

"15 But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. Matt 16:19

19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. . . .”

Thus, the doors of the kingdom of heaven are opened and Peter’s listeners are poised to enter into the kingdom of which Christ is King and to be added to the church of which Jesus is head.

Acts 2:37

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Thus, the first gospel sermon ended. “What shall we do” rings out as a question for the ages, asked here and reiterated by Saul of Tarsus (Acts 22:10) and the Philippian jailor (Acts 16:30).

5. What Shall We Do To Be Saved: Acts 2:37-41

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter ended his sermon in an effort to convict the people of their guilt—they had crucified the Lord and Christ. Peter said in Acts 2:36: “36 Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” What follows, is their response to Peter’s sermon and what he told them that they should do to overcome this guilt and be saved.

Brothers, What Shall We Do?

Acts 2:37

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

They Heard the Gospel

“What shall we do” rings out as a question for the ages, as we saw in the previous lesson. The listeners to Peter’s sermon asked the question here; and the Philippian jailor reiterated it in Acts 16:30; and Saul of Tarsus, in Acts 22:10. In Acts 16:29-30 the Philippian jailor asked the question after Paul and Silas miraculously escaped from their prison cells, “29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’” To his question, Paul gave the jailer a specific answer in Acts 16:31-34:

31 They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. 33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. 34 The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God – he and his whole family.

In Acts 22:6-10, Saul of Tarsus asked a similar question:

6 "About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. 7 I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?'

8 "'Who are you, Lord?' I asked.

"I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. 9 My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.

10 "'What shall I do, Lord?' I asked.

A man named Ananius told Paul exactly what to do in Acts 22:14-16:

14 "Then he said: 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. 15 You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'

A discussion of these conversions will follow in the appropriate chapters of Acts. For the purpose here, notice that they have a commonality in the questions asked—what must we

do?—and the answers given—believe, repent, and be baptized. In each example of conversion, there is expressed urgency—“at that hour of the night,” in the instance of the jailer, and “What are you waiting for?” in the case of Saul. These same commonalities exist in the conversions of these thousands on the Day of Pentecost. Indeed, every conversion recorded in the scriptures follows the commonalities in this divine pattern.

They Were Cut to the Heart

When they heard Peter’s sermon, they were cut to the heart. The first step in obeying the gospel is hearing. Rom 10:14 makes clear that one must hear to believe, “And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?” It is from this hearing that faith comes according to Rom 10:17, “17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” The faith of Peter’s audience was manifest in the response, “They were cut to the heart.” The power of the gospel, told to honest hearts, delivers the power of God for salvation in Rom 1:16, “16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.” The preaching, the hearing, and the believing always go together. This is the one and only plan that pleases God. Paul wrote in 1 Cor 1:21, “God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.”

Paul summarized these essential steps in obeying the gospel in 1 Cor 15:2, “2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.” As a result of hearing and believing, these on Pentecost cried out, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Peter Answers Their Question

Acts 2:38

38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

All of Acts 2:38 is a direct reply to the question: “What shall we do? These notes consider each part, one by one; however, they should all be seen as the parts of a whole. The verse is perhaps the most succinct statement of the plan of salvation given us by the Holy Spirit. Belief is included here by direct inference in that they were cut to the heart and asked what to do, thus; they manifested belief by conviction and action.

Repent

Repentance, along with the forgiveness of sins, was an element of the great commission as recorded in Luke 24:47: “47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” According to Paul in 2 Cor 7:10, “10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.” Godly sorrow is a prerequisite for repentance. There can be no faking it, as it were, it must be heartfelt.

Repentance is not an end in itself, but it leads to salvation and leaves no regret. In Acts 3:19, Peter gave the follow-up step to repentance—turning to God—when he said, “19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.” Immediately upon obeying the gospel, one receives salvation, a heart without regret, the wiping out of ones sins, and times of refreshing. Separate from this repentance, there is no path that leads to these marvelous spiritual blessings. Paul warned in Acts 17:30,

“30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.”

The same God, who gave his only begotten son (John 3:16), loves us and does not wish us to perish by failing to repent. Peter wrote in 2 Peter 3:9, “9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” The scriptures are clear on the need for the sinner to repent in order to be saved.

Be Baptized

Just as the scriptures are clear on the need to repent, so they are clear on the need for the alien sinner to be baptized. *Repent* and *be baptized* are connected by *and*, which is a coordinate conjunction. Coordinate conjunctions link two parts of equal importance. In this case, one cannot say repentance is the only step in the conversion process; nor can one say baptism is the only step in the conversion process. They are both equally essential. The matter is the same with *belief* and *baptism*. The Lord said in Mark 16:16: “16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” *Belief* and *is baptized* are connected by a coordinate conjunction; therefore, they both are absolutely essential to salvation. Some false teachers hold that faith only saves, and others hold that baptism only saves (as in the case of infant baptism which requires neither faith nor repentance). Even though this command by Peter is eternally sufficient to require baptism of penitent believers for salvation, the scriptures offer overwhelming evidence that God demands baptism for salvation.

We have already seen that the Lord commanded, “16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” When Paul was told what to do it became imperative that he be baptized. Luke recorded the command given him in Acts 22:16, “16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.” Thus far, the scriptures cited teach that baptism is essential for the forgiveness of sins, to be saved, and for washing away your sins. It is difficult, indeed, to imagine false teachers who blatantly ignore these scriptures and say that one does not have to be baptized.

Without baptism, there is no new birth. Jesus told Nicodemus of the new birth as being of water and the spirit in John 3:3-5

"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

4 "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.

Paul explained how this new birth only takes place in Rom 6:3-4:

3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may **live a new life**.

Peter wrote clearly that baptism saves in 1 Peter 3:21-22:

21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also — not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ . . .”

The new birth creates a new creature—a creature born from the waters of baptism to walk in newness of life with the pledge of a good conscience toward God. Paul stated the case in 2 Cor 5:17, “17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

Every One of You

When Peter says, “Every one of you,” he is speaking of the all-inclusive, universal nature of the gospel. The great commission of the Lord made clear that his gospel was for everyone, and that everyone, to be saved, had to obey the gospel. Matt 28:19 records that the gospel was to go to all nations: “19 Therefore go and make disciples of *all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” In Mark 16:15-16, the Lord stated that it was to *all the world* and *to all creation*, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. 16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” God does not exclude a single person from obeying the gospel of Christ.

Paul spoke of this universal and all-inclusive nature of the gospel in Rom 1:16, “16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.” There are no exceptions to who is included, and there are no exceptions to who must obey.

In the Name of Jesus Christ

“In the name of Jesus Christ,” is the equivalent of *by the authority of Jesus Christ*. In Acts 4:12, Peter stated the absolute authority vested in Jesus and the name of Jesus, “12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” Jesus asserted that God had given him all authority in Matt 28:18, “18 Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’” This authority is all-inclusive and exerted in Christ by God when He raised him from the dead, according to Eph 1:20-21

20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

Baptism—and every other scriptural act—are by the authority and in the name of the Lord Jesus. Paul wrote in Col 3:17, “17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

In New Testament times, those, who were baptized into a name other than the name of Jesus, were quick to be told that they were in error. They were just as quick to be baptized properly in the name of Jesus. In Acts 19:1-6, Luke records an example of those inappropriately baptized in the name of John the Baptist:

19 While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples 2 and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”

They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”

3 So Paul asked, “Then what baptism did you receive?”

“John's baptism,” they replied.

4 Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." 5 On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

Paul also taught that baptism into names other than the Lord Jesus was error in 1 Cor 1:13-14: "13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? The answer to these rhetorical questions (questions to which the answer is self-evident) is, of course, *no*. Today, as in the first century, one should not be baptized into the name of a man or into the name of a church or into any other name given by men.

Scriptural baptism is into (in) the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

For the Forgiveness of your Sins

In this command, Peter gave the central purpose of baptism: Baptism is for the forgiveness of sins. Peter's command here is an exact fulfillment of the Lord's command when he gave the great commission to his apostles in Luke 24:47-48, "47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." False teachers, who claim baptism is because of the forgiveness of sins, do so because they believe that salvation comes by faith only. After salvation comes by faith only, in their view, one needs be baptized because of that salvation and into their denomination. It should be sufficient here to cite James 2:24: "24 You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone."

However, the very nature of the Lord's promise and the language used force us to understand that in the phrase, *baptism for the forgiveness of sins*, forgiveness of sins results from baptism. The word used for *for* is the Greek word *eis*. Strong explains its meaning:

eis (ice); a primary preposition; to or into (indicating the point reached or entered), of place, time, or (figuratively) purpose (result, etc.); also in adverbial phrases:

(Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright © 1994, 2003, 2006 Biblesoft, Inc. and International Bible Translators, Inc.)

The phraseology of *forgiveness of sins* further confirms that forgiveness of sins is a result of baptism. In Matt 26:27-28, the Lord used the exact same phrase when talking of the power of his blood: "27 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. No one would contend that the Lord poured out his blood because of the forgiveness of sins. No, it is certain that forgiveness of sins is a result of his shedding his blood. Heb 9:22 states clearly this use of *for* to indicate a *result in*, "22 In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."

Apart from Christ shedding his blood, there is no forgiveness of sins; and apart from our being baptized, there is no forgiveness of sins.

You Will Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit

Peter promised those who repented and were baptized that they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul defines the very nature of this promise in Eph 1:13-14:

13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of

those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.

The Holy Spirit guarantees our inheritance by assuring us that we were saved when we believed and obeyed the word of truth as in the Acts 2:38 text, “repent and be baptized.” Paul makes it certain that we know this communication takes place in Rom 8:16-17:

16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

The scriptures are equally emphatic about how the Spirit testifies with our spirit in Eph 6:17: “17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” The word of God—the sword of the Spirit—is perfect and complete in its communications. In 2 Tim 3:14-17, Paul details the all-sufficiency of scriptures to tell us all things, including how and when we know that we are saved:

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

The Call of God Answered

Acts 2:39

39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call."

Christ’s promise is all-inclusive of the Jews and the Gentiles, conditioned by the statement, “. . . all whom the Lord our God will call.” These notes have discussed how that those who are saved must call on the name of the Lord in Acts 2:21: “21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” The calling works two ways: Man calls on the name of the Lord, and the Lord calls man through the gospel.

Rom 8:28-30 teaches that those who are called are justified and glorified:

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. 29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; **those he called, he also justified**; those he justified, **he also glorified**.

2 Thess 2:13-15 teaches that the sanctifying work of the Spirit calls man through the gospel, which man must hear and believe:

13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved **through the sanctifying work of the Spirit** and through belief in the truth. 14 He **called you to this through our gospel**, that you might share in the **glory** of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 2:40-41

40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." 41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Peter's concluding remarks show that the Lord called disciples through the word. Salvation was in their hands at this point. "Save yourselves!" He said. Those that accepted the word were added to their number. In verse 2:47, we shall learn that those added to their number were not only baptized, but also saved: "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." The logic and conclusion are too clear to misunderstand:

All those baptized were added to their number.

All those added to their number were those being saved.

All those being saved were those who were baptized.

6. Obedient Believers Added Together in the Church: Acts 2:42-47

Acts 2:42-47 chronicles the establishment of the church, including details of worship and fellowship. Prior to this point, the scriptures speak of the kingdom and the church in the future tense. After this point in the scriptures, the New Testament always refers to the church and kingdom in the past tense. For example, Christ used both the church and the kingdom in the future sense in Matt 16:18: “18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I **will** build my **church**, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. 19 I **will** give you the keys of the **kingdom** of heaven.” Although the Lord spoke of his kingdom and church coming in the future, he made clear that it was imminent in Matt 16:28: “28 I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

All passages, from this point in Acts 2 forward, will speak of the church and the kingdom in the present or past tense. For example, in Eph 5:25-27, Paul taught:

Christ **loved** the **church** and gave himself up for her 26 **to make** her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and **to present** her to himself as a radiant **church**, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

Paul also speaks of the kingdom in the past tense in Col 1:12-14:

12 giving thanks to the Father, who **has qualified** you **to share** in the inheritance of the saints in the **kingdom** of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Rev 1:4-6 confirms that the church and the kingdom are present beginning in Acts and not some future date:

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, 5 and from **Jesus Christ**, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the **ruler of the kings** of the earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made **us** to be a **kingdom** and **priests** to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

The kingdom and church began in Acts 2, when the Lord added the baptized believers to his church and made them to be a kingdom for ever and ever. It is in this context, that Luke describes the early church in Acts 2: 42-47. [Emphasis in the above scriptures, added].

The Devotion of the Early Church

Acts 2:42

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

The early church devoted themselves to specific and certain acts of worship. To follow the New Testament pattern, the church today must emulate this worship. Any addition to this scripture must have specific scripture authorizing the item of worship. Both the KJV and the ASV translate *they devoted themselves* as *they continued steadfastly*. That disciples are to stand fast is an affirmation that the Lord set the attitudes and doctrines in the church. These include “the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

These acts of worship remain unchanged throughout the New Testament, save for the inclusion of singing. Paul wrote in Eph 5:19-20:

19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Col 3:16 voices the same teaching:

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Churches of the 21st century must continue steadfast in these practices, neither adding to them nor taking away from them. The church must be devoted to them.

The Apostles' Teaching

To be devoted to the apostles' teaching prescribes the domain of what the worship and character of the church must be. There are no provisions here or elsewhere to innovate by adding to or taking away from the apostles' teaching. Jesus laid the foundation that limited the teaching of the church to the apostles' teaching in Matt 28:18-20

18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

The Lord limited the apostles to teaching what he had commanded them. Now, we must be especially careful to maintain only the teaching commanded by the Lord to the apostles and prophets. To teach anything but the commanded teaching is to be eternally condemned, according to Paul in Gal 1:6-9:

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! 9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

The church today should be just as dedicated to keeping the apostles' teaching as the early church was. This dedication to the New Testament teaching is the only path to having the true church of Christ today and to securing the true church of Christ for the future.

To the Fellowship

Someone has said, when speaking of church fellowship in this generation, that when you say the word *fellowship*, you can smell the coffee perking. In the New Testament, the word *fellowship* denoted some of the most serious of church activities. The meaning of the word *fellowship* is mutual participation. The NIV uses the word *participation* for *fellowship* in 1 Cor 10:14-17:

14 Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. 15 I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a

participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?

In verse 16, the ASV uses the word *communion* for *fellowship*: "16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ?" We have participation or communion or fellowship with the blood of Christ. Therefore, we can see that fellowship is mutual, and it is participatory. How better to express the relationship of Christians to one another, to Christ, to the Holy Spirit, and to God the father?

According to 1 John 1:3-4, the Christian fellowship is with one another, and at the same time it is with the Father and with Jesus Christ:

3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. 4 We write this to make our joy complete.

All of Christian fellowship requires us to walk in the light, not the darkness. This is the true fellowship from which all else flows: 1 John 1:6-7 teaches:

6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

True fellowship includes sharing in the sufferings of Christ in Phil 3:10-11:

10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead."

The fellowship of Christians denies participation in the evils of the world. Christians must be careful not to participate in the evil affairs of the world where they have nothing in common. Paul warned against this hazardous fellowship in 2 Cor 6:14-16:

14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 15 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?

In the verses that are to follow, Luke will describe how Christians have fellowship when they give of their income to aid and to assist those less fortunate. This fellowship through giving is also the way that we participate in the preaching of the gospel. Two passages, which translate the word *fellowship* with the word *sharing* in the NIV, illuminate the relationship of our contribution of money (1 Cor 16:1-2) to Christian fellowship. 2 Cor 8:3-4 shows by example how we must have fellowship with needy saints wherever they may be:

3 For according to their power, I bear witness, yea and beyond their power, (they gave) of their own accord, 4 beseeching us with much entreaty in regard of this grace and the fellowship in the ministering to the saints. ASV.

Phil 4:15-16 shows by example that we must have fellowship with those preaching the gospel:

15 And ye yourselves also know, ye Philippians, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church had fellowship with me in the matter of giving and receiving but ye only; 16 for even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my need. ASV.

In our worship service, the contribution becomes one of the principle avenues of fellowship as an act of sacrifice to God and a way to participate with the poor and the preachers of the gospel.

To the Breaking of Bread

Above, fellowship, with the table of the Lord (1 Cor 10:14-17), is a participation with the body and blood of the Lord. In the New Testament worship, breaking of bread in the religious sense signifies the Lord's Supper. Now that the kingdom has come, the Lord's prophecy concerning his supper fulfills itself in the church. Jesus said in Matt 26:26-29,

26 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

27 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."

This earliest of churches, composed of those in the kingdom, participated with Lord in the Lord's suppers. Paul spoke of Christians in Col 1:12-13, placing them firmly in the kingdom upon their conversion:

12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued [*translated* ASV] us from the dominion of darkness and brought [*delivered* ASV] us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. (editor's notes added).

The members of the church here are *the saints*—those set apart—in the kingdom of light; they are also in the kingdom of the son. This is exactly where Christ said that he would eat and drink of the table of the Lord.

These Christians devoted [*continued steadfast* ASV] themselves to the breaking of bread. Acts 20:7 establishes the frequency of communion or, as designated by Paul, the Lord's Supper: "7 On the first day of the week, we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. The primary purpose of coming together on the first day of the week was to break bread. The early church met every first day of the week, and on every first day of the week, they broke bread—they communed with the Lord in his supper.

In 1 Cor 11:17-22, Paul spoke of the meetings of the church: "For your meetings do more harm than good." Paul identified these meetings: "When you come together as a church." In this context, Paul taught the purpose of the meeting by condemning their negative example: "When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat." Later in 1 Cor 16:2, Paul specifically set the time of the meetings: "2 On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made."

The early church met on the first day of the week giving attention to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship in giving, and to communion by breaking bread. The true church of Christ will follow this same pattern today.

To Prayer

This early church gave steadfast attention to prayer. In Acts 4:24 ff, at the release of the

apostles from prison the entire church prayed: "When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God." When elders were appointed the church prayed in Acts 14:23: "23 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust." Time and again, the apostles charged the churches to pray:

Rom 12:12-13--12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Phil 4:6--The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Col 4:2-3--Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. 3 And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.

1 Tim 2:1-2--2 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone— 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

1 Tim 2:8--8 I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.

James 5:16--16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

Summary of Scriptural Worship

In this text, Luke presents a summary of scriptural worship: "42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." The true church of Christ will follow this pattern which is repeated throughout the New Testament. The Lord expressly stated that true worshipers will worship in spirit and truth in John 4:23-24:

"3 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

Music is not included in these statements because music like speech is a means to worship and not an act of worship. Instrumental music and babbling speech cannot be worship; for they neither teach nor pray, which is what true worshipers do with speech and vocal music. The New Testament could not be clearer in defining musical worship. Eph 5:19-20 teaches:

19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Col 3:16-17 reiterated this teaching:

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

The early church did not worship with instruments, handclapping, arm waving, dancing, play acting, and solo or choir singing. Throughout the New Testament all worship follows the pattern set in Acts 2:42. The church since the New Testament time followed one of two paths in worship: On the one path, Christians follow the form (pattern) given in the apostles'

teaching as taught in Rom 6:17: "17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted." On the other path, false teachers and their followers pervert the worship taught in the apostles' teaching according to Phil 3:17-18: "17 Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. 18 For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ."

The true church of the Lord in the twenty-first century will follow the pattern of worship taught by and practiced in the New Testament. Paul's command to Timothy in 2 Tim 1:13-14 should be sufficient today:

13 What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. 14 Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you — guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

The Attitude and Fellowship of the Early Church

Acts 2:43

43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.

These early Christians were filled with awe. Five times, the gospels speak of people, who observed the miracles performed by John the Baptist and Jesus, as being filled with awe. However, in this passage the connective *and* separates the awe of the Christians and the miracles of the apostles, giving them equal weight. The awe of these Christians resulted from the salvation that had come to them and the changes in their lives. They were as Paul described in Heb 12:28-29: "28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our 'God is a consuming fire.'"

The apostles did many wonders and miraculous signs just as Mark had recorded in Mark 16:20: "20 Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it." The Hebrew writer wrote that the signs and miracles confirmed the word in Heb 2:3-4:

This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. 4 God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

Certainly the most awesome of the accomplishments of that day were the forgiveness of sins and the salvation that came to these very first Christians.

Acts 2:44

44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

The authenticity of the conversions of these early Christians showed in the manner of life that they lived.

Acts 2:46

46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 4a praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.

The fellowship of the early church extended from the worship to the homes and to the community. The manner in which they had broad fellowship—in worship, in the temple courts, and in homes—instruct us today. Many narrowly define fellowship as a spiritual part of the worship only and restrict social fellowship to the homes only. Some of these believe a building owned by the church cannot be a place for common meals where members eat together. Indeed, prior to the invention of the auto, common sense would have dictated to eat where Christians gathered to worship. Two approved New Testament examples show Christians eating a common meal at the same place where they worshiped. In addition to Acts 2:46, Acts 20:7 shows the church coming together: “7 On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight.” It was after Paul preached and Eutychus fell out of the window that the church ate and talked until the next morning in Acts 20:11-12. A position that removes all social fellowship from the meeting of Christians cannot be sustained by the scriptures.

On the other hand, many carry social fellowship to the extreme where it overwhelms the true purpose of assembling together, occupying the center stage of what happens at the meeting place. Paul deals with just such an abuse in 1 Cor 11:17-22, where in verse 17, he said, “17 In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good.” In verse 18, Paul designated that the abuses were “when you come together as a church.” These abuses were twofold: they were divided in verse 19. and in the rest of the passage (verses 20-22). they were abusing the purpose of coming together with their eating and drinking:

20 When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, 21 for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. 22 Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!

The modern practice of using entertainment and social activities to capture and to keep people attending the meetings of the church is clearly unscriptural. The modern practice of forbidding any social fellowship or activities in the place where the church meets is also clearly unscriptural.

Paul puts eating and drinking in the proper relationship to the spirituality required by God in Rom 14:17-18:

17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

Verse 47a shows the relationship of the disciples with God and men: “. . . praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.”

The Saved Added to the Church

Acts 2:47b

47b And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

The momentous event of that day of Pentecost closed with the Lord adding to those who were being saved. To summarize, the message began with the salvation which God gave to all who obeyed him. The message of salvation included God's promise through prophets like Joel

whom Peter quoted in Acts 2:21:

21 And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

Peter's sermon cut the people to the heart and provoked them to ask the question that all mankind should ask in Acts 2:37: "37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" Peter's answer to their question came in Acts 2:38:

38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call."

The very next verse, Acts 2:40, demonstrates that Peter is speaking about salvation: "40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."

In Acts 2:41, records that the ones who accepted the word were baptized, and those who were baptized were added to their number: "41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day."

Finally, in Acts 2:47b, those being saved were added to their number: "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." Those of Acts 2, who obeyed God by repenting and being baptized, were added to the church and saved by the same acts of obedience. There is special significance in the use of the past, progressive, passive verb form—*were being saved*. The saving of obedient people is by God, and it is a continuous act that repeats over and over each time a person obeys the gospel.

7. The First Miracle of Healing: Acts 3:1-12

Many things were happening rapidly to the early church—not the least of which was its rapid growth. In the previous chapter, Acts 2:41, "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day." In Acts 2:47, the number expanded even more: "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." This early growth of the church foreshadowed future growth and a period of favor with all the people.

This early church had exuberance for the Lord that fostered meetings in the temple courts every day (Acts 2:46). The events of chapter 3 unfold as Peter and John were going into the temple courts, as their practice was.

In the Name of Jesus, the Crippled Beggar Walks

Acts 3:1-4

3:1 One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer – at three in the afternoon. 2 Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. 3 When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. 4 Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" 5 So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

Peter and John going up to the temple and a man crippled from birth set the scene for the first healing miracle, the next gospel sermon, and a very large number of additional conversions, adding 5,000 members to the church. The temple to which they were going was commonly called Herod's Temple—a contemporary effort to rebuild Solomon's Temple.

The East Gate, commonly called the Beautiful Gate, was located on the East wall. It was through this gate that Peter and John were entering, and it was at this gate where the beggar was put each day. Since his cohorts carried him there each day, his ailment was conspicuous; and since he was so afflicted from birth, his affliction was apparent to all who passed by, day after day and year after year. The subjects of modern faith healing have ailments that are neither apparent nor conspicuous. Verse 4 makes clear that the power to perform the miracle is in the Holy Spirit, working through Peter and John, and not dependent in any way on the lame man. How often today are the failed miracles of false teachers blamed on the lack of faith in the subject and not on the lack of power in the performer of the miracle.

In summary, true miracles of healing cure conspicuous and apparent ailments with the healing power coming from the Holy Spirit via the one performing the miracle.

Acts 3:6-10

6 Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." 7 Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. 8 He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. 9 When all the people saw him walking and praising God, 10 they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

Not only is the illness of the crippled man conspicuous and apparent in its nature before the miracle, but the complete healing of the illness is evident to all who watch. The proof of this miracle, as being one from God, rests on the eyewitnesses who saw the man who "jumped to

his feet and began to walk." They knew that the man that they saw was the one who used to sit begging. The result was that "they were filled with wonder and amazement."

What has happened here is what Jesus had said would happen, in Mark 16:17-18, "17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name . . . they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well." In Mark 16:20, Luke recorded that these signs confirmed the word preached as the word of God, "20 Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it." What will unfold is a miracle, confirming the word, and a gospel sermon so confirmed as God's word and directed at converting those listening.

The Hebrew writer certifies this exact purpose of miracles in Heb 2:3-4:

This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. 4 God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

In the modern world, one must pay close attention to how and to whom "signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit [were] distributed according to his will;" for there are many modern practices concerning miracles which lack any scriptural authority whatsoever. These practices are foreign to any expressed statements of the will of God in the New Testament.

The New Testament teaches that God distributed gifts of the Holy Spirit to the apostles on the Day of Pentecost in a way more powerful than to any other group. By the laying on the apostles' hands, God also extended less comprehensive gifts to members of the body, the church. Finally, God gave the gift of the Holy Spirit to all penitent, baptized believers.

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit Given to the Apostles

Of the gifts of the Holy Spirit given unto men, the apostles received the most comprehensive set. These comprehensive gifts came by the direction of the Lord before he ascended. He taught that these gifts were to be given only to the apostles. That these gifts are exclusively for the apostles is clear in Mark 16:14-20. Verse 14 shows that Jesus was instructing the apostles and not the general group of all Christians who were to follow: "14 Later Jesus appeared to the **Eleven** as they were eating." Verse 15 says, as Jesus gave the great commission: "He said to **them**." The antecedent of the pronoun *them* is *the Eleven* of verse 14. It is to the Eleven that he said in verses 17-18:

17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.

In this passage, it is certain that the promise of these broad gifts was to the apostles. In verse 19, the *them* repeats the *they* of its antecedent: "19 After the Lord Jesus had spoken to **them**, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God." Finally this very same Eleven followed the Lord's command: "20 Then **the disciples** went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it."

In Acts 1, Luke confirms that Jesus was instructing only the apostles The Lord promised only this Eleven that they should receive power from on high in Acts 1:2-5

. . . after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the **apostles** he had chosen. 3 After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs

that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. 4 On one occasion, while he was eating with **them**, he gave them this command: "Do not [you] leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days **you** will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

In the following verses, Acts 1:6-8, the pronouns and their antecedents stay the same. In verse 6, the antecedent to *they* is still *the apostles* of verse 2: "6 So when **they** met together, **they** asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?'" In his response in verse 7, he identified exactly who would receive power of the Holy Spirit—*them* with the antecedent *the apostles*. In verse 7, the Lord also was definite as to whom this power of the Holy Spirit would descend and when it would ascend—*you* with the antecedent *the apostles* and *when the Holy Spirit comes on you*:

7 He said to them: "It is not for **you** to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But **you** will receive power **when the Holy Spirit comes on you**; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

When the Spirit came on the apostles on the Day of Pentecost, recorded in Acts 1:26-2:4, the antecedents and the pronouns make it certain upon whom this power came. Acts 1:26 sets the antecedent as the apostles: "26 Then **they** cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the **eleven apostles**." In Acts 2:1-4, the pronouns all refer to the apostles:

1 When the day of Pentecost came, **they** were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 **They** saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of **them**. 4 All of **them** were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled **them**.

After the miracle of the healing of the crippled man in chapter three, the Jewish leaders knew that the power rested with the apostles; for when these leaders confronted the apostles, Peter and John, in Acts 4:5-7, they said "By what power or what name did **you** do this?"

Anyone, who contends today that they have these powers of the Holy Spirit conveyed to the apostles, would have to meet the qualifications of being an apostle and of being present on Pentecost when the power descended from on high.

[Emphasis in the scriptures in this section is added.]

The Spiritual Gifts Given Temporarily by the Laying on the Apostles' Hands

By the laying on the apostles' hands, God also extended less comprehensive gifts to members of the body. The only Christians, who received these gifts, received them only by the laying on of the apostles' hands. No one today can claim to have these gifts, since there are no apostles living to lay hands on people. Acts 8:12-17, makes clear that the apostles were necessary to impart the gifts. The narrative picks up in verses 12-13:

12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

These Samaritans were baptized believers, including Simon, a sorcerer in his life before conversion to Christ. Since Simon had "practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the

people (Acts 8:9),” he knew the real miracles when he saw them; and therefore, he was amazed and followed Philip everywhere. In verses 14-17, it took the laying on of the apostles’ hand to give spiritual gifts to these converts:

14 When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. 15 When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, 16 because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Simon knew the difference between the gifts imparted by the apostles and the power of the apostles to impart these gifts. That this measure of the Holy Spirit gave Christians miraculous powers is evident by Simon’s response, which was to try to buy the ability to impart spiritual gifts to people. These spiritual gifts did not come with baptism, which was for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38) and which washed away their sins (Acts 16:22) and which saved them (1 Peter 3:21). In verse 17, it is evident that this measure of the Holy Spirit came by the laying on of the apostles’ hands. Of course, when the apostles died, this measure of the Holy Spirit ceased to operate in the members of the church. 1 Cor 12 and 13 teach what these gifts to the early church were and when they passed away:

1 Cor 12:7-11 outlines the spiritual gifts given to the early church by the laying on of the apostles’ hands. The early church without the completed New Testament needed these gifts for their development and protection:

7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

Since the imparting of these gifts depended on the laying on of the apostles’ hands, when the apostles’ died, the impartation ceased. This period agrees with the statement by Paul in 1 Cor 13:8-10:

8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.

Some argue that the perfection—the condition when the gifts would cease—comes when Christ who is perfect comes or when heaven which is perfect comes. However, in the context, 1 Cor 13:13 sets the limits of that which is perfect to within a world where faith, hope, and love remain past the time of passing on of the spiritual gifts: “13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” When Christ and/or heaven come, faith will give way to sight and knowledge; hope will be realized. In Rom 8:24, Paul said, “24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all.” When Paul speaks about when perfection comes, he is speaking about a time when the church knows not in part but fully, according to 1 Cor 13:12: “. . . Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” The perfection is the perfect law of James 1:25: “25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it — he will be blessed in what he does. ”

With the completed revelation of God's will, the need for spiritual gifts passed away. Some today might say that if they could see a miracle, they would believe. The Lord forever refuted this idea in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:27-31:

27 "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, 28 for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

29 "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

30 "'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

31 "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

In truth, people of the 21st century have all that they need in the scriptures left to them by the apostles and prophets inspired, as only they were, by the Holy Spirit. Paul summarizes the case in 2 Tim 3:16-17: "16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

The Gift of the Holy Spirit Given to All Penitent, Baptized Believers

These notes have already discussed fully the gift of the Holy Spirit that comes to all penitent, baptized believers as promised in Acts 2:38-39:

38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call."

To summarize, this promise to all Christians is our guarantee of salvation.

Peter promised that those who repented and were baptized would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul defines the very nature of this promise in Eph 1:13-14:

Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.

The Holy Spirit testifies with our spirit, according to Rom 8:16-17:

16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Finally, the scriptures are equally emphatic about how the Spirit testifies with our spirit in Eph 6:17: "17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

All the People Were Astonished and Peter Begins Preaching

Acts 3:11-12

11 While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. 12 When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made

this man walk?

The happenings of this episode occur on Solomon's Colonnade—sometimes called Solomon's porch. Solomon's Colonnade was inside the East Gate. That all the people were astonished and came running, established the authenticity of the miracle. With the crowd excited, Peter begins his sermon. After he recognizes them as men of Israel, he asks two rhetorical questions that set the stage for his sermon in the following verses. Why were they surprised? After all, they had been witnesses of the miracles of Jesus and the demonstration of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Why did they think it was by the power or godliness of the apostles? This last question demonstrates that miracles and signs are never by the power of man, but by the power of the Holy Spirit of God.

8. Peter's Second Gospel Sermon: Acts 3:13-26

Chapter 3 began with the healing of the man, crippled from birth. This was a man known to all who had entered by the gate called Beautiful over the years, for he was placed there to beg. All the people were astonished and rushed to the apostles who were on Solomon's colonnade.

11 While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. 12 When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?"

As seen in the previous lesson, the happenings of this episode occur on Solomon's Colonnade—sometimes called Solomon's Porch. Solomon's Colonnade was inside the East Gate. That all the people were astonished and came running, established the authenticity of the miracle. With the crowd excited, Peter begins his sermon. After he recognizes them as men of Israel, he asks two rhetorical questions that set the stage for his sermon in the following verses. Why were they surprised? After all, they had been witnesses of the miracles of Jesus and the demonstration of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Why did they think it was by the power or godliness of the apostles? This last question demonstrates that miracles and signs are never by the power of man, but they are by the power of the Holy Spirit of God.

Peter Presents the Facts of the Gospel

Acts 3:13-14

13 The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. 14 You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you.

Peter begins this sermon differently from how he began his first sermon (Acts 2). In that first sermon, he started in Acts 2:16, "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel." Here Peter begins by alluding to their venerated ancestors—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—saying that their God has glorified his servant Jesus. Peter speaks the facts of the gospel in harsh, convincing words: you handed him over to be killed, and you disowned the Holy and Righteous One. That Pilate had decided to let him go and that they asked for the release of a murderer only accentuated their guilt. Thus, Peter accuses them harshly and directly, "You killed the author of life." All of this leads Peter to the second fact of the gospel, "God raised him from the dead." Finally, Peter asserts that they are witness to this resurrection. In every regard, these facts of the gospel are the same as Peter preached in chapter 2 and Paul listed in 1 Cor 15:3-8:

3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

That the Jews traded the life of Christ for the life of a murderer further condemned them for their acts. The indictment becomes even harsher, since they disowned the *Holy and Righteous One*.

Acts 3:15-16

15 You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. 16 By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see.

The *author of life* speaks to the deity of Jesus in his capacity as the only begotten son of God (John 3:16) through whom all things were created and in his capacity as the author of salvation. John, Paul, and the Hebrews writer tell of the Son of God through whom all things exist. John wrote in John 1:3-5:

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

Paul taught that this authorship extended to all things in Col 1:16: "16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him." Heb 1:3 confirms this all-inclusive nature of the power of Christ in creation: "3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word."

Important along with this authorship of the Son of God in the physical creation is his authorship of salvation. Heb 2:10 explains the role of Christ in salvation: "10 In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering." The Hebrew writer also states that Christ is both author and perfecter of our faith in Heb 12:2: "2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Peter states the facts of the gospel clearly in verse 15: they killed the author of life; God raised him from the dead; and the apostles and others present were eyewitnesses. Compare these facts to those presented by Paul in 1 Cor 15:3-8 cited above.

Acts 3:16 conclusively states that the power in the miracle was the power of the Lord Jesus. The faith necessary was the faith of the apostles. Indeed, the crippled man was unaware of what was happening to him until the miracle was complete. It is also important that the miracle was a complete healing of the man and it was apparent to the Jews. Present day, alleged miracles lack these characteristics of proof.

Repent, Then, and Turn to God

Acts 3:17-18

17 "Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. 18 But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer.

Peter transitions from accusing the Jews to a position from which he can teach them what they must do to be saved; therefore, he addresses them as brothers. Both they and their leaders acted out of ignorance. Their ignorance was no excuse as Paul was to teach in Acts 17:30-31:

30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. 31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.

God had foretold this suffering of his Christ. Now Christ becomes the fulfillment of those prophecies. Christ had taught that he was the fulfillment of the law and the prophets in Matt

5:17: "17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

Acts 3:19

19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, 20 and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus.

Repent and turn to God follows the teaching of Acts 2:38 when Peter taught, "38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." In Acts 3:19, sins that are wiped out parallels Acts 2:38 where Peter says that sins are forgiven. The phrase, *times of refreshing*, parallel the phrase, *the gift of the Holy Spirit*. "That he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus," must speak of the return of Jesus in the last day. That Jesus' return in the last day is the consummate conclusion to the gospel story becomes evident in the next verse.

Acts 3:21

21 He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

The restoration of the kingdom of God was promised from the beginning—a fact known by the Jews to whom Peter is speaking. It was this restoration that the apostles asked about after the ascension of Jesus in Acts 1:6: "6 So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" James quoted Amos in speaking of the restoration of the kingdom which included Jews and Gentiles in Acts 15:15-18:

15 The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

16 "After this I will return
and rebuild David's fallen tent.

Its ruins I will rebuild,
and I will restore it,

17 that the remnant of men may seek the Lord,
and all the Gentiles who bear my name,
says the Lord, who does these things'

18 that have been known for ages.

Peter also wrote of the time when God would restore all Christians to his eternal glory in 1 Peter 5:10-11:

10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. 11 To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

However, it was Paul who specifically placed the restoration of the kingdom at consummation of all things in 1 Cor 15:22-26:

22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all

his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

It is very clear that the New Testament teaching excludes modern millennial theories. The Christ reigns now as King of Kings and Lord of Lords

Christ Fulfilled All the Prophets

Acts 3:22-23

22 For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. 23 Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.'

In the preceding verse, Peter referred to the restoration of all things as prophesied; now, he connects the Christ whom they crucified to the promise of God to Abraham to raise up a prophet like him. The promise, found in Deut 18:15, 18,19, included commands for these Jews to whom Peter speaks: "You must listen to everything he tells you." And if do not "listen to him [you] will be completely cut off from among his people." These charges are just as true to hearers today as they were when they were first spoken.

Acts 3:24-26

24 "Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. 25 And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' 26 When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."

Peter's argument that Christ was the fulfillment of God's prophecies is now made the stronger by reminding these Jews that all the prophets from Samuel on had foretold these days. Finally, Peter shows that the promise to Abraham is now fulfilled so that all the peoples of the earth are blessed in the Christ, Abraham's offspring.

Peter concludes this powerful sermon by asserting that God raised up his servant, Jesus Christ, and sent him first to the Jews. However, Peter preaches that the blessing is only available if they, and all mankind by implication, turn each one from their wicked ways.

In chapter 4, the narrative turns to the responses of the Jewish leaders to the power of the miracles and to the power of the words of the apostles.

9. In the Power and Name of Jesus Christ: Acts 4:1-31

In Acts 3, Peter through the power of God, had healed a man crippled from birth who lay at the gate called Beautiful. Amazement and excitement ran through the members of the Jewish community who were assembled at Solomon's Colonnade inside the temple walls. Peter preached his second sermon to these onlookers. Peter began his sermon by presenting the facts of the gospel—the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, and the fact that they were witness to these events. During his sermon in Acts 3:16, Peter established that it was in the name of Jesus that this miracle was accomplished: "16 By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see." This fact becomes the central question of chapter 4.

This same Jesus also required them to obey the gospel in Acts 3:19-20: "19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, 20 and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you — even Jesus." This command was identical to what he told his listeners on the Day of Pentecost Acts 2:38-39:

38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off — for all whom the Lord our God will call."

Peter's sermon ended with the teaching in Acts 3:24-26 that all that they were witnessing was that which was promised by all the prophets:

24 "Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. 25 And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' 26 When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."

This is the context of the inquiries and persecutions that begin in Acts 4 and continue over the next several chapters

The Priests, the Temple Guard, and Sadducees Are Greatly Disturbed

Acts 4:1-4

4:1 The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. 2 They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. 3 They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. 4 But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.

The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees were disturbed because the apostles were teaching that Jesus was raised from the dead. Sadducees were of the ruling class and flatly denied the resurrection of the dead. Webster defines them: "A member of a Jewish party of the intertestamental period consisting of a traditional ruling class of priests and rejecting doctrines not in the Law (as resurrection, retribution in a future life, and the existence of angels)." They seized Peter and John and put them in jail until the next day. However, many who heard believed and the number of men grew to about 5,000. The passage does not mention the women converts, which might have doubled their number. In the next

verse, the narrative follows the fate of these jailed apostles as these leaders of the Jews interrogate them.

“By What Power or What Name Did You Do This?”

Acts 4:5-7

5 The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. 6 Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family. 7 They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

The next day, Peter and John were brought before the leaders—a cross section of rulers, elders, and teachers and many of the family of the high priest, Caiaphas. The question was about their authority to heal the crippled man: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

Acts 4:8-11

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! 9 If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, 10 then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. 11 He is

"the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone."

That Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit illustrates that he was speaking by the inspiration of God. Peter was later to write in 2 Peter 1:20-21 how scripture came into being

20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

The inspired and emphatic answer to their question addressed the issue as a fact: "Know this." Peter proceeded to state, "It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth." He followed by indicting them with the facts: they crucified him; God raised him from the dead, and this man stands before you healed. Peter concludes this indictment by quoting Ps 118:22: "22 The stone the builders rejected/ which has become the capstone."

There Is No Other Name under Heaven

Acts 4:12

"12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

Peter's answer, "It is by the name of Jesus Christ . . .," stands as a fundamental principle for those who believe that Jesus is Lord of lords and King of kings. However, in verse 12 that principle is reiterated in no uncertain terms: Salvation is in no one else; no other name under heaven is given; by the name of Jesus, we must be saved. In this single announcement, the authority of Jesus sounds forth for all ages. It echoes the statement of Christ, himself, when he said in Matt 28:18-20:

18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey

everything I have commanded you.”

Not only does the name and authority of Jesus apply, excluding all others, when obeying his gospel, but it applies in every single thing the church does. Paul instructed us in Col 3:17, “17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” John also spoke of this unlimited power of the Lord in Rev 12:10:

10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:

“Now have come the salvation and the power
and the kingdom of our God,
and the authority of his Christ.

“Speak No Longer to Anyone in This Name”

Acts 4:13-14

13 When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. 14 But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say.

When these leaders of the Jews heard Peter, they concluded that there was nothing that they could say against them because the miracle was obvious, with the man whom everyone knew standing right there. The lesson for those today who are deceived by supposed faith healers is that their miracles, which are not apparent and obvious, are no miracles at all.

We learn three other things about Peter and John: they were courageous, unschooled, and ordinary. Today, the power of the gospel rests on the shoulders of ordinary but courageous Christians.

Acts 4:15-17

15 So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. 16 "What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it. 17 But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name."

These leaders of the Jews were puzzled as to what to do with Peter and John. Everybody living in Jerusalem knew about this outstanding miracle, leaving the leaders with the only recourse—a warning not to speak any longer in the name of Jesus.

Acts 4:18-22

18 Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. 20 For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

21 After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. 22 For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

When the leaders gave their command not to speak in the name of Jesus, Peter and John gave a reply that should be the reply of all Christians who are so challenged. They said, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. 20 For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” This example is in vivid contrast to how

some of the leaders of these same Jews responded to Jesus. The issue of confessing Jesus was drawn during his personal ministry when he taught in Matt 10:32-33: "32 Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. 33 But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven." During that time some of the leaders believed him but would not confess. John 12:42-43 teaches:

42 Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.

The people were so taken with the healing of the man over 40 years old, the leaders dared not go against them and released the apostles, threatening them, but not punishing them.

The Apostles and Saints Offer a Prayer of Thanksgiving

Acts 4:23-24

23 *On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. 24 When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.*

As one might expect, after their release by the chief priests and elders, the apostles returned to their own people, the church, and prayed. When Jesus instructed his disciples to pray, he included a proper address to the Lord, God, of heaven in Matt 6:9-13. "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name," he taught them. When Jesus prayed in John 17:1, he addressed God. "Father," he said. Here in Act 4:24, the church addressed God as "Sovereign Lord," and recognized that He created all things.

Acts 4:25-26

25 *You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:*

"Why do the nations rage

and the peoples plot in vain?

26 *The kings of the earth take their stand*

and the rulers gather together

against the Lord

and against his Anointed One.'

In verse 25, it is important to note the apostles and early church, once again, recognized how scriptures come into being. God is the source of truth, and by his spirit, he speaks through the mouths of the inspired writers—in this case David. The statement of David is from Psalms 2:1-2. In their language, the apostles here are in harmony with Paul's description of how we get the word of God through the apostles and prophets in 1 Cor 2:11b-13:

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. . . . no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 12 We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. 13 This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.

Acts 4:27-30

27 Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. 28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. 29 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. 30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

The church recognizes that their situation is an exact fulfillment of God's prophecy by the mouth of David. The Gentiles and peoples [the verb form in the Greek text is plural like form in David's prophecy] of Israel who killed Jesus were now threatening the church. The prayer is an appeal for boldness in speaking the truth on the part of the church, and an appeal to God for miraculous signs and wonders to confirm their words.

31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

God's response to this prayer was immediate and powerful: God shook the place where they were meeting, they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God boldly. All of this becomes preparation of the church for the events that follow. They certainly knew that whatever was to come, they would not have to go it alone—God, who created all things, would be with them no matter what.

10. Benevolence and Discipline in the Early Church: Acts 4:32-5:11

In Acts 4:32-5:11, benevolence and discipline in the early church interweave. Both illustrate that the early church understood that God's commands must be obeyed. From the beginning on the Day of Pentecost, Christians had tended to one another's needs. In Acts 2:44-45, immediately after the establishment of the church, the believers took care of the destitute: "44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need." Acts 4:44 picks up this story of brotherly kindness manifested through the church.

Benevolence in the Church

Acts 4:32-35

32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. 33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. 34 There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

That all the believers were one in heart and mind is the prerequisite for giving. The power of their love and unity was such that they disowned their possessions and shared everything. There are many examples of this selflessness as the church spread and grew. Two will suffice: the church at Antioch gave liberally to the churches of Judea as Luke recorded in Acts 11:27-30:

27 During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) 29 The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. 30 This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

The other example is the churches of Achaia and Macedonia who also sent help to the poverty-stricken Christians of Judea according to 2 Cor 8:2-5:

2 Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. 5 And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

Because of their giving, there were no needy Christians among them. This example shows that many who owned lands willingly sold them, laying the money at the apostles' feet. The money was distributed to everyone as they had need.

Acts 4:36-37

36 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), 37 sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

One such person who sold land and brought the money to the apostles was Joseph, called

Barnabas. Barnabas is an example of a Christian who fulfilled his commitment to care for the needy. Our next example is one of two people who did not fulfill their commitment but, instead, sought to keep the money for themselves. Indeed, Barnabas lived up to his name which means Son of Encouragement. Barnabas will reappear 30 times in the book of Acts, where he becomes one of Paul's main companions on his missionary journeys.

Ananias Lies to God

Acts 5:1-2

5 Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. 2 With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, were as different from Barnabas as night is different from day. The key to understanding their greed is in the fact that they kept back part of the money for themselves. Their sin was two-fold: they were greedy, and they were deceitful. They failed to understand the teaching of the Lord when he said in Luke 12:15, "15 Then he said to them, 'Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.'" Greed and lust for money rise above all other sins and become themselves idolatry, according to Paul in Col 3:5, "5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry." Ananias and Sapphira also failed to understand the extreme jeopardy in which they had placed themselves. Christ had taught in Matt 6:24, "24 No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."

Acts 5:3-4

3 Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? 4 Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God."

They compounded their sin of greed and love for money by their effort to cover up their sin, which led them to lie. One sin leads to another, according to the adage. In fact, lying is such a dangerous sin that it appears to separate the righteous from the unrighteous and the Revelation. Rev 14:4-5 speaks of the righteous by saying, "They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. 5 No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless." In contrast, all liars are condemned in Rev 21:8, "8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

Acts 5:5-6

5 When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. 6 Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

The immediate punishment of Ananias, and later Sapphira, was to require their lives. Punishment came immediately and by the hand of God, but this is the only occurrence of such discipline. This intervention by the hand of God through the Holy Spirit is a one-time happening, parallel to the intervention of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Immediately, they

came upon all who heard, confirming the word of God spoken by the apostles on the matter of giving. There are many other occasions of discipline in the New Testament, but they are all administered by the church. Rom 16:17-18 calls for discipline of divisive people:

17 I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. 18 For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites.

In 1 Cor 5:11, Paul instructs the church at Corinth to avoid immoral members:

11 But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

Paul also instructs the church on how to deal with erring brothers in 1 Cor 5:4-5:

4 When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, 5 hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

2 Thess 3:14-15 also describes how the church is to deal with members who are erring:

14 If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. 15 Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

The church today should take special care to implement the directions given by the apostles on discipline. The church will be stronger, and Christians who are restored will be saved.

Sapphira Also Lies to God

Acts 5:7-8

7 About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"

"Yes," she said, "that is the price."

9 Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."

The fate of Sapphira is exactly the same as that of Ananias; she pays with her life for testing the Holy Spirit. Of all the lessons learned from this episode, perhaps the greatest is that we are not to test the Holy Spirit. The consequences for us will be far greater than losing our lives; we will lose our eternal souls.

Great Fear Seized the Whole Church

Acts 5:10-11

10 At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11 Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

The conclusion of this example is in how the church responded. Luke reports that great fear seized the whole church and all who heard. As we read about this episode, we should develop proper respect for the instruction of the Lord. In our actions, we should commit to what the Lord has said that we must do. The respect that we have for the Lord will keep us

from lying about our sins and testing the Holy Spirit. Of the two examples, Barnabas and Ananias and his wife Sapphira, Barnabas illustrates the attitude of benevolence necessary for all Christians. The other lesson from Ananias and Sapphira is that we are not to test the Holy Spirit.

12. Ministering to Grecian Widows and Stephen Accused: Acts 6

The kindness shown by one another to the needy Christians is a recurring theme of Acts. From the very beginning in Acts 2:44-45, those with financial means shared with those less fortunate: “44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.” This practice of sharing re-occurs in Acts 4:34-35:

34 There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

As generous as these early Christians were, contentions in the church focused on misunderstandings and hard feelings about these benevolent acts of the church. In Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira thought they could keep money for themselves that they had committed to God for benevolent purposes.

Chapter 6 is about a dispute in the church over accusations of neglect of the Grecian widows. As the chapter develops, the narrative will also pick up the story of Stephen—one of those servants selected to tend to the problem of the Grecian widows. Stephen was also an evangelist, whose activities occupy Luke’s narrative through chapter 7.

The Grecian Jews Complain

Acts 6:1

1 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

The Grecian Jews were the focal point of a complaint against the Hebraic Jews. The term Grecian Jews refers to Jews who were Hellenized from the time of Alexander the Great and used Greek as the language of their common discourse. The term also referred to Jews who had Greek ancestry. The passages cited in the introduction make clear that the church was providing for destitute saints, including widows. The church, time and time again, provided aid to distressed saints. The *Book of Acts* provides examples of help going to Jerusalem and Judea from Antioch, Macedonia, Greece, and Achaia. Such benevolence to destitute Christians is categorically commanded in passages like Gal 6:9-10:

9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

James 1:27 reiterates the Christian obligation to help those in *distress*: “27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

The New Testament makes clear that the first line of attack against the distress of poverty is the family and not the church. Paul explained the obligation of family when talking about which widows the church should support in 1 Tim 5:44

But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and

grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.

The burden of unmarried relatives, including widows, falls first to the family, an obligation that extends beyond the immediate family to all relatives, according to 1 Tim 5:8: "8 If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." There are simply occasions when the church is not to be burdened. Paul wrote in 1 Tim 5:16:

16 If any woman who is a believer has widows in her family, she should help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need.

1 Tim 5:9-10 teaches that widows, who are permanently enrolled for care by the church, must meet certain qualifications:

9 No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, 10 and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.

The Grecian widows of this passage may have been widows with qualification, or they may have been destitute and distressed by these times of general famine. A message in the early chapters of Acts is that the 21st century church should always see to the needs of less fortunate members.

Acts 6:2-4

2 So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

The difficulty that this problem posed for the apostles was how could they attend to the teaching of the word of God and wait on tables. The appropriate focus for the apostles was attention to prayer and to the teaching of the word. The parallel problem in our day is that elders should not neglect the teaching of the word. Peter taught what the proper work of elders was in 1 Peter 5:2: "2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers." According to Paul in 1 Tim 5:17, this spiritual tending and feeding of the church is accomplished by teaching, "17 The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching." Elders, just as the apostles, are not to get bogged down in the physical aspects of maintaining the work of the church.

In this case, the church was to choose men to wait on the widows. The men were to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.

Seven Men Selected to Oversee the Daily Distribution of Food

Acts 6:5-6

5 This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. 6 They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

The problem was one of ethnic and cultural differences, not unlike those that rise in the

church today, since the widows were Grecian. In this context, those selected had Greek names. Today the church must move aggressively to resolve real or imagined problems of discrimination, making sure that minority groups are represented in the leadership of the church. Luke's narrative will focus next on the work of Stephen and Philip, prominent evangelists in Judea and Samaria.

Acts 6:7

7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

As the word of God spread and as the number of disciples increased rapidly, a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. The reaction of these priests may be compared to the reaction some of the Jewish leaders had to Christ and his message. John reported in John 12:42-43:

42 Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.

Perhaps the contention and subsequent bitter events of the next two chapters followed the inroads made by the gospel among the leaders of the Jews. The focal point of this contention becomes Stephen.

Stephen, One of the Seven Accused

Acts 6:8-10

8 Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. 9 Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)-Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen, 10 but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.

Stephen was a man of extraordinary virtues: he was full of God's grace and power; he did his work among the people; he had wisdom; and he spoke by the Spirit. That he spoke by the Spirit elevates his discourse, in the next chapter of Acts, to scripture, inspired by God. Peter defines such scripture 2 Peter 1:20-21:

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

The power of Stephen's teaching was such that they could not stand up against it. As Paul described it in 2 Tim 3:16, such teaching is powerful and all-sufficient: "16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."

Stephen's opposition seems to have come from the Grecian Jews, of which he was one. The opponents were of Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and Asia.

Acts 6:11

11 Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God."

Since they could not stand up against Stephen's wisdom and Spirit inspired word, they turned to deceit. *In secret* implies that they were conniving against Stephen; and, of course, Stephen

would never speak against Moses and God. It is this great deceit that leads to the coming events.

Stephen Seized and Brought before the Sanhedrin

Acts 6:12-14

12 So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. 13 They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. 14 For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

This group of the elders and teachers of the law and the Sanhedrin are the same people who wrongly accused Christ and turned him over to Pilot in Luke 22:66: "66 At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them." This is the very same group who had accused Peter and John in Acts 4:5-7:

5 The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. 6 Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family. 7 They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

This group plus the Sanhedrin tried the apostles when they were jailed in Acts 5:21-22: "When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin – the full assembly of the elders of Israel – and sent to the jail for the apostles."

The accusers provided false witnesses violating the commandments given to Moses in Deut 5:20: 20 "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor." As this study moves through chapter 7, we find that the Sanhedrin also violated their law of commandments. Deut 19:18-19 teaches, "18 The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against his brother, 19 then do to him as he intended to do to his brother."

The charge itself is worth careful attention, since the entirety of Stephen's defense is really a defense of Christ's teaching about the Mosaic Law. These accusers alleged that Stephen speaks against the holy place and the law, that Jesus would destroy this place, and that Jesus would change the customs handed down. These false accusers were evil, indeed, but just as evil were the Sanhedrin who listened to their lies, according to Prov 21:28:

28 A false witness will perish,
and whoever listens to him will be destroyed forever.

Acts 6:15

15 All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

The figure of speech, *like the face of an angel*, shows what should have frightened the Sanhedrin into accepting the teaching of Stephen. In Matt 28:2-4, the appearance of an angel is like lightning:

2 There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. 4 The guards were so afraid of him that

they shook and became like dead men.

Terrifying also was the appearance of the angel to announce the birth of the Christ in Luke 2:9-10:

9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

The Spirit of God bore witness that Stephen spoke His word; the Sanhedrin had every reason to believe him.

13. Stephen's Defense and Martyrdom: Acts 7

At the close of chapter 6, Stephen was seized and brought before the Sanhedrin. There, false witnesses testified that Stephen spoke against the Holy Place [the temple], saying that **Jesus would destroy the temple**. They also testified that **Stephen taught against the law, saying that Jesus changed the customs Moses handed down to them** (Acts 6:12-14).

Those sitting in the Sanhedrin saw Stephen's face like the face of an angel (Acts 6:15). In this way the Spirit of God bore witness that Stephen spoke his word. By this miracle, the Sanhedrin has every reason to believe Stephen.

The defense that follows is detailed and complete. These notes will not paraphrase Stephen's words, for they speak eloquently in his defense. These notes will focus on the two charges: Stephen spoke against the temple, and Stephen taught against the law.

Jewish History and Background Undergirding Stephen's Defense

Acts 7:1

7 Then the high priest asked him, "Are these charges true?"

God Calls Abraham

Acts 7:2-3

2 To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran. 3 'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.'

Stephen starts his defense with their father Abraham. This is the beginning of his refutation of their charge that Stephen taught against the law, saying that Jesus changed the customs Moses handed down to them. By beginning with Abraham, Stephen can argue that God promised Abraham the Christ as his seed. From this beginning with Abraham, Stephen traces the history of the Israelites, emphasizing the immutable fact that Jesus, the Christ, was promised to them and prophesied of by them.

The map traces the history of Abraham's travels unfolds God's plan from Abraham to Moses.

God's Promise to Abraham

Acts 7:4-8 [Abraham's journey is the green line]

4 "So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. 5 He gave him no inheritance here, not even a foot of ground. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child. 6 God spoke to him in this way: 'Your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. 7 But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,' God said, 'and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.' 8 Then he gave Abraham the covenant of



circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.

The first point that Stephen makes from this historical evidence is that God promised Abraham, and that God made a covenant with Abraham. In Stephen's argument, God's land promise will extend to include the seed of Abraham as a blessing to all the nations of the earth. At this point, however, one can see the heads of the Sanhedrin nodding agreement.

Joseph Sold into Slavery and Famine Strikes

Acts 7:9-16

9 "Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him 10 and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt; so he made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.

11 "Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our fathers could not find food. 12 When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers on their first visit. 13 On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph's family. 14 After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. 15 Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our fathers died. 16 Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.

The recitation of how the patriarchs and the Israelites got to Egypt was commonly known Jewish history, known and agreed to by all of the Sanhedrin. Thus far, there is no tension in Stephen's defense in how he sees Jewish history and how the Sanhedrin sees it.

The Birth of Moses

Acts 7:17-22

17 "As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt greatly increased. 18 Then another king, who knew nothing about Joseph, became ruler of Egypt. 19 He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our forefathers by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die.

20 "At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for in his father's house. 21 When he was placed outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. 22 Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

Tension and focus begin to build in Stephen's argument as he says, "As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham." This will be the fork in road for the Sanhedrin, Jews, and Stephen, a Christian. Stephen's travel down this road will take him to Jesus Christ the seed of Abraham.

The Israelites Reject Moses

Acts 7:23-29

23 "When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites. 24 He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. 25 Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. 26 The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by

saying, 'Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?'

27 "But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, 'Who made you ruler and judge over us? 28 Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' 29 When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.

Remember that part of the charges against Stephen was that he taught against the law, saying that Jesus changed the customs Moses handed down to them. As Stephen moves through the story of Moses, he is still reciting facts about Moses with which the Sanhedrin must agree. However, he makes two points that reveal Moses' attitude toward the Israelites and their attitude toward him. First, Moses, even at this early stage, thought of himself as a deliverer of the Israelites. Stephen said, "Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not." The Israelites view of Moses is negative: "27 But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, 'Who made you ruler and judge over us?'"

Moses Returns from Midian

Acts 7:30-34

30 "After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. 31 When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to look more closely, he heard the Lord's voice: 32 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.

33 "Then the Lord said to him, 'Take off your sandals; the place where you are standing is holy ground. 34 I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.'

As Stephen continues, he is still saying nothing that would alarm the Sanhedrin.

Moses Prophesies the Coming of the Christ

Acts 7:35-36

35 "This is the same Moses whom they had rejected with the words, 'Who made you ruler and judge?' He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. 36 He led them out of Egypt and did wonders and miraculous signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the desert.

It is interesting that Stephen covered Moses history in such few words, documenting his selection by God to be their ruler and deliverer and the power to do wonders and miraculous signs.

Acts 7:37-38

37 "This is that Moses who told the Israelites, 'God will send you a prophet like me from your own people.' 38 He was in the assembly in the desert, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living words to pass on to us.

Stephen at this point increases the tension in his argument: "This is that Moses who told the Israelites, 'God will send you a prophet like me from your own people.'" The passage is from Deut 18:15 and adds a critical statement with which the Sanhedrin would have been familiar: "**You must listen to him.**" The argument will be that just as the Israelites refused to listen to Moses so the Jews of Stephen's day refused to listen to Christ, the one like Moses.

The next point is exactly that: the fathers refused to obey Moses:

The Fathers Refused to Obey Moses

Acts 7:39-43

39 "But our fathers refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. 40 They told Aaron, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt – we don't know what has happened to him!' 41 That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and held a celebration in honor of what their hands had made. 42 But God turned away and gave them over to the worship of the heavenly bodies. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets:

*"Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings
forty years in the desert, O house of Israel?*

43 *You have lifted up the shrine of Molech
and the star of your god Rephan,
the idols you made to worship.*

Therefore I will send you into exile' beyond Babylon.

The heat comes into Stephen's defense when he turns to the negative history of the Israelites and their repeatedly turning away from God to Idolatry. The story of the golden calf is well-known, but what is not well known about the Israelites is they turned to worship of heathen gods and planets, especially in the later history of Judah. The quotation is from Amos 5:25-27. Molech was the national god of the Ammonites:

MOLECH

The name of a heathen divinity whose worship figures largely in the later history of the kingdom of Judah. As the national god of the Ammonites, he is known as "Milcom" (1 Kings 11:5,7), or "Malcam" ("Malcan" is an alternative reading in 2 Sam 12:30-31; compare Jer 49:1,3; Zeph 1:5, where the Revised Version margin reads "their king")..(from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright © 1996, 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

Rephan was the name for Saturn:

REPHAN

(re'-fan): A name for Chiun, the planet Saturn.

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The Old Testament documents the infidelity of the Jews. For example, the Israelites turned repeatedly to Baal, plaguing such prophets as Jeremiah. In the New Testament, Christ indicted the Israelites for rejecting the prophets, saying that the leaders of his day would have participated in the sin of their forefathers in Matt 23:29-32:

29 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. 30 And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' 31 So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. 32 Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!

Many of these contemporary leaders were of the same group in the Sanhedrin trying Stephen.

God Does Not Live in Houses Made by Men

Acts 7:44-50

44 "Our forefathers had the tabernacle of the Testimony with them in the desert. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. 45 Having received the tabernacle, our fathers under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, 46 who enjoyed God's favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. 47 But it was Solomon who built the house for him.

48 "However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says:

49 "'Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.
What kind of house will you build for me?
says the Lord.
Or where will my resting place be?
50 Has not my hand made all these things?'

Stephen now turns to the second contrived charge: **that Jesus would destroy the temple.** After a brief history of the tabernacle, Stephen made his point by quoting Isa 66:1-2. Simply put God does not live in earthly buildings—not then and not now. A great contrast between the Jews and Christians is that God's temple is the church. This is the point of contention upon which the leaders were trying to convict Stephen. When the Lord added to the church daily such as were saved in Acts 2:47, he made a house not made with hands. In 1 Tim 3:15, Paul explains this house of God: "5 if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth." Peter showed how the spiritual house of God is built in 1 Peter 2:4-8:

4 As you come to him, the living Stone — rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For in Scripture it says:

"See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious cornerstone,
and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame."

7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

"The stone the builders rejected
has become the capstone,"

8 and,

"A stone that causes men to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall."

They stumble because they disobey the message — which is also what they were destined for.

What plays out in real time in Stephen's trial is the rejection of Christ and the spiritual nature of his house as compared to the temple of Jews. Stephen immediately turns up the heat.

Stephen's Concluding Argument

Acts 7:51-53

51 "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! 52 Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him – 53 you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it."

Stephen does not shirk from preaching the truth in no uncertain terms. Stiff-necked people, uncircumcised heart and ears, just like your fathers, resist the Holy Spirit – with these phrases, he convicted them of killing the Righteous One.

The Stoning of Stephen

Acts 7:54-60

54 When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. 55 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

57 At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, 58 dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

59 While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

In Acts 2:36-37, Peter preached with similar vigor, accusing the Jews of murdering Jesus:

36 "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

On that day, they were cut to the heart, but they wanted to know what to do. Now Stephen confronts furious men, clenching and gritting their teeth, they were so mad. Stephen on the other hand, full of the Holy Spirit, saw the glory of God and Jesus at His right hand. Heaven was open to him. When they dragged him out and stoned him, they laid their clothes at the feet of Saul—a subject who returns in the next chapter. One of the most charitable acts of all time is when Stephen said, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." People respond to the gospel in many ways. Sometimes they obey, as on the day of Pentecost; sometimes, they become angry, even to the point of murder; and sometimes, they are indifferent, as was the case of Felix in Acts 24:25:

25 As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, "That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you."

14. The Gospel Goes to Judea and Samaria: Acts 8:1-25

Acts 7 found Stephen making his defense and confronting men so angry at the truth that he taught, they were clenching and gritting their teeth. Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit and saw the glory of God and Jesus at His right hand, as heaven was opened to him.

They stoned him! The antecedent of *they* are the ones before whom Stephen was defending himself in Acts 6:15: "All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel." They laid their clothes at the feet of Saul—a principal actor as Acts 8 opens. As he died, Stephen said, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." Chapter 8 opens with Saul approving of Stephen's death.

The Church Persecuted and Scattered

Acts 8:1-3

And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. 2 Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. 3 But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

Beginning with the stoning of Stephen, a great persecution broke out against the church, led by Saul. Because of this persecution, the church was scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Even though Saul was vicious in his attack—going from house to house and putting men and women in prison—the scattering of the church worked to the good of the gospel. This persecution fulfilled the prophecy of Jesus in Acts 1:8: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Saul, the most notorious persecutor of the church, lived to regret all that he had done. Later, after becoming a Christian himself, he was defending himself before the Council in Acts 22:4-5, where he admitted that he persecuted Christians even to their death: "4 I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, 5 as also the high priest and all the Council can testify."

Even after his conversion, Paul, as Saul was then called, expressed how diminished he felt for persecuting the church. In 1 Cor 15:9 he said, "9 For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."

In Acts 8, he is the aggressive leader in the persecution of the church.

Philip in Samaria

Acts 8:4-8

4 Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. 5 Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. 6 When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. 7 With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. 8 So there was great joy in that city.

These early Christians, although scattered and persecuted, still went everywhere preaching the word. Philip, as Stephen, was one of the servants selected to serve tables for the Grecian widows in Acts 6. He went to a city in Samaria, where he preached the Christ. When the

crowds heard Philip and saw the signs, they paid close attention to what he said. The signs accomplished just what Mark 16:20 said they would accomplish: “20 Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.” As in other examples of healing, the signs and miracles of Philip cured conspicuous and apparent ailments with the healing power coming from the Holy Spirit via the one performing the miracle [See Acts 3 notes].

Beginning with this trip into Samaria, Philip becomes the focal point of preaching in Acts 8. Along with Peter and John, he will dominate the spreading of the gospel throughout Judea and Samaria. The map depicts their travels in the region.



Simon the Sorcerer and His Followers Obey the Gospel

Acts 8:9-11

9 Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, 10 and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is the divine power known as the Great Power." 11 They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic.

Simon was a successful, practicing sorcerer who was so good that he amazed all the people, and he could boast that he was someone great. He was a sorcerer of great credibility as witnessed by the fact that all the people, high and low, gave him their attention. They thought him to be so great that they said he was the “divine power” known as the “Great Power.” He had also been around for a long time. This is to illustrate that both Simon and his followers were so experienced, that they recognized the true greatness and superiority of the real God manifested in the miracles of Stephen.

Acts 8:12-13

12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

With the signs and miracles confirming that Stephen was preaching the word of the true God, the Samaritans believed Philip when he preached the gospel. Having believed, they were baptized, and Simon himself believed and was baptized, fulfilling the command of Jesus when

Map 86 - Ministry of Peter and Philip

- Philip's ministry in Samaria (Acts 8:4 f) —————
- Peter & John sent to minister throughout Samaria (Acts 8:14 f) —————
- Philip's ministry in plains (Acts 8:26 f) - - - - -
- Peter's ministry (Acts 9:32 f) - - - - -

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he gave the great commission in Mark 16:16, “16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” At this point the Samaritans, including Simon, were saved; just as the Jews were saved on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:40-41: “41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.” Luke described those added to their number as *being saved* in Acts 2:47: “47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

In the next passage, Luke describes how they received the power of the Holy Spirit to perform the spiritual gifts given to the early church members by the laying on of the apostles’ hands. This endowment is not to be confused with the gift of the Holy Spirit given to all penitent, baptized believers [See notes on Acts 2:38]. The gift of the Holy Spirit that comes to all Christians comes immediately upon their obeying the gospel. Eph 1:13-14 describes this gift:

13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.

Simon Seeks to Buy the Ability to Lay on Hands

Acts 8:14-17

14 When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. 15 When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, 16 because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

When the apostles arrived, they discovered that the Samaritan Christians who had believed and obeyed in baptism the word of the Lord, had not received the Holy Spirit—not to be confused with the gift of the Holy Spirit which all obedient believers receive. The measure of the Holy Spirit spoken of here is that measure which came only by the laying on of the apostles’ hands. This measure imparted the power to perform signs and miracles, but not the power to lay hands on others and thus to pass spiritual gifts to them. This ability to impart the power of the Holy Spirit to others resided only in the apostles. The fact that this is the power that Simon seeks to buy with money proves the point.

These spiritual gifts which came only by the laying on of the apostles’ hands were evidently the measure of the Holy Spirit which resided in Philip, or else he could have endowed these Samaritans with like gifts. Instead, it took the apostles to equip the Samaritan church. Timothy is an example of another evangelist who received this measure of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of an apostle’s hands. Paul wrote Timothy in 2 Tim 1:6-7:

6 For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 7 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

The kinds and duration of these spiritual gifts occupy the totality of 1Cor 12, 13, and 14.

The Kinds of Spiritual Gifts in the Early Church

1 Cor 12:4-11 lists and describes the spiritual gifts given to individual members of the church:

4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are different kinds of

service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

The Duration of Spiritual Gifts

Paul taught that the gifts would cease and when they would cease in 1 Cor 13:8: "But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away." He pinpointed when they would pass away in 1 Cor 13:9-10: "For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears." That perfection that he speaks of is the perfect law that gives freedom according to James 1:23-25:

23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does.

Paul and James use the same analogy to explain the difference between the fragmented prophecy available through spiritual gifts and the full knowledge available in the completed revelation of God's complete and written word. Paul wrote, when telling of the cessation of spiritual gifts in 1 Cor 13:12: "12 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." James said, as quoted above, "23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like." Both point to that which is perfection (Paul) and the perfect law (James). With the perfect law in written form, the need for spiritual gifts ended. Paul declared this perfection of the completed revelation in 2 Tim 3:16-17: "16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Acts 8:18-19

18 When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money 19 and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

Simon, who had exploited the Samaritans in his previous life, reverts to his old ways. He knows that the most powerful measure of the Holy Spirit is the ability to pass gifts on to others, and he knows that only the apostles hold that gift. He tried to buy this ability, offering them money. One way that we know for a certainty that there are no spiritual gifts working in the church today is that there are no apostles to pass them on by the laying on of hands.

Acts 8:20-23

20 Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of

God with money! 21 You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. 22 Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. 23 For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

Simon's sin brought him to a sorry and lost state, and Peter chastised him with pointed and abrasive language. Simon was simultaneously guilty of thinking that he could buy the gift of God; of a heart that was not right with God; of being wicked and in need of repentance and prayer; of having such a thought in his heart; and of being full of bitterness and captive to sin. Peter castigates him in language that fits every willful sin a Christian can commit. Heb 10:26-31 pronounces the judgment against all who deliberately sin:

26 If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, 27 but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. 28 Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." 31 It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Indeed, sorry is the deliberate sin, and sorry is the state of one standing before the judgment. Simon, so recently saved from his sin by the grace of God and the blood of Jesus, now finds himself in a state far worse than the one before his conversion, proving that Christians can sin in such a way as to be eternally lost. Peter described the condition of Christians who willfully sin in 2 Peter 2:20-22:

20 If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. 21 It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. 22 Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud."

Based on the example of Simon and these scriptures there can be no such condition as the popular false doctrine summarized by the words: *once saved; always saved*. Or by the more formal words: *impossibility of apostasy or perseverance of the saints*.

Simon Repents

Acts 8:24-25

24 Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me."

25 When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

Simon, just as all of us, recognized his desperate plight as a Christian sinning before God. Repent and pray for forgiveness is the path to recover taught in the scriptures. John spoke to this very same issue in 1 John 1:8-9: "8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." If we confess our sins he, who is our advocate before the father, will forgive us of our sins. 1 John 2:1-2 explains: "But if anybody does sin,

we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. 2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. . . .”

Simon also understood the role of other Christians in our recovery when we sin. “Pray for me,” he asked Peter. James also teaches us to pray for one another in James 5:16: “16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”

As Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, they preached the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

15. Philip and the Ethiopian: Acts 8:26-40

In the first part of Acts 8, Philip had preached to and converted many of the Samaritans. When Peter and John arrived on the scene, they imparted the ability to perform spiritual gifts upon these new Christians (See 1 Cor 12, 13, 14). Simon the sorcerer sinned by seeking to buy the ability to impart this measure of the Holy Spirit upon others. However, he was restored by repenting and praying that the sin be forgiven him (See 1 John 1:8-9). After this, Acts 8:25 says, "25 When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages."

In the second part of Acts 8, Philip returns with his evangelistic effort with the Ethiopian in Acts 8:26-40.

Philip Meets the Ethiopian

Acts 8:26-29

26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." 27 So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. 29 The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

In this episode of conversion, an angel of the Lord directs Philip: "Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." Then, the Spirit said, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." The subject of this attention was an Ethiopian eunuch, illustrating that the gospel is for people of all races. Most certainly, an Ethiopian in those days would have been an African by race. However, he is also a eunuch, illustrating that gospel goes to men and women no matter how life's circumstances alter them mentally or physically. The man was also an important official in the government, responsible for the queen's treasury, showing that the gospel is also for those of the highest status in this life. Because he had been to Jerusalem to worship and because he was reading from Isaiah the prophet, he was most likely a Jewish proselyte.



In Acts 2:5 Luke had recorded that there were in Jerusalem, on the Day of Pentecost, Jews from every nation, "5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven." Luke had illustrated how the gospel found its way to Judea and Samaria in the first part of Acts 8. Now, the gospel goes to the Ethiopian who can take it all the way down to the Horn of Africa, fulfilling Christ's words in Acts 1:8, "8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The story of Philip and the Ethiopian is a wonderful fulfillment of the Lord's great commission in Luke 24:46-47: "The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,

47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

Do You Understand?

Acts 8:30-31

30 Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

31 "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

When Philip, running up to the chariot, heard the man reading Isaiah, he asked one of the most important questions that one might ask: "Do you understand what you are reading?" This question opens up the discussion with the Ethiopian. The Ethiopian's answer shows the importance of evangelists in the role of conversion. God chose that the gospel should be taught. Without such teaching there can be no belief.

Jesus explains how men come to God in John 6:44-45:

44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me.

Paul details the work of preachers and churches in this process in Rom 10:14-15:

14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can they preach unless they are sent?

The Lamb of God

Acts 8:32-33

32 The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture:

*"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before the shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.*

33 *In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.*

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth."

Isaiah's prophecy of Christ as a lamb speaks to the sorrow and humiliation of the perfect redeemer's death upon the cross. The death of Christ by shedding innocent blood took away the sin of the world, according to John the Baptist, who used the metaphor in John 1:29-30:

29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'"

He repeated it again in John 1:35-36: "35 The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. 36 When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" However, it was Peter who related the blood of the lamb to our redemption in 1 Peter 1:18-20:

18 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. 20 He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

The Good News about Jesus

Acts 8:34-35

34 The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" 35 Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

"Who is he talking about?" asked the eunuch, turning the conversation to the good news about Jesus. What exactly Philip told the eunuch has been the subject of great speculation. There are three possibilities. One, Philip could have elaborated on the meaning of Jesus, the Lamb of God, since this relates directly to the passage that the eunuch was reading. Two, he could have expanded on the meaning of the good news about Christ. Three, he could have told him what to do to be saved, since the eunuch learned what that gospel required and asked: "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" Perhaps, they discussed all three subjects

The Lamb of God

The Lamb of God is an important metaphor in the New Testament. In Rev 5:6, 8, John describes the Lamb in heaven:

6 Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, . . . 8 And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb.

In Rev 5:12, they sing a song of the restitution of the Lamb's power, wealth, wisdom, and strength:

12 In a loud voice they sang:

"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise!"

In Rev 7:9-10 multitudes so large no one can count them stand before God and the Lamb. The multitudes are pure (white robes), and God and the Lord own salvation:

9 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. 10 And they cried out in a loud voice:

"Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb."

In Rev 7:14-15, the multitude, that no man can count, are those who washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb: "And he said, 'These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the

Lamb." This multitude is they who have received the promises of the Lord in Rev 7:17:

17 For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd;

he will lead them to springs of living water.

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Rev 12:10-12 teaches that the blood of the Lamb overcomes the devil. In Rev 13:8, the book of life belongs to the Lamb, and in Rev 2-4, heaven sings the song of Moses and the Lamb. Rev 17:14 calls the Lamb the Lord of lords and the King of Kings. In Rev 19:6-9, the great wedding in heaven is between the Lamb and his bride. The bride, those that no man can count, wears white robes. The white robes make the bride ready for the Lamb in Rev 19:7-9:

and his bride has made herself ready.

8 Fine linen, bright and clean,

was given her to wear."

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

9 Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God."

The Lamb occupies the central role right through to the end of the Revelation. When the angel showed John the bride, the wife of the Lamb in Rev 21:9-14, he showed him the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven. In Rev 22:1-4, the water of life flows out of the throne of God and the Lamb.

The Good News about Christ

One may be certain that Philip "told him the good news about Jesus," since this is exactly what the scripture says. The good news, by definition, is the gospel of Christ; and the gospel of Christ is, by definition, the death, burial, resurrection of Jesus, and the fact that he was seen by many witnesses [See 1 Cor. 15:1-5 and the notes on Acts 2:14-36].

Every sermon, recorded from the beginning in Acts 2 to Acts 8, included the facts of the gospel.

Peter preached in that first sermon in Acts 2:31-32: "

31 Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. 32 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.

This grand theme of the gospel repeated itself in Acts 3:15-16: "15 You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this."

During their appearances before the tribunals, Peter and John repeated this gospel message. In Acts 4:10-12, Peter preached this gospel:

10 then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. 11 He is

"the stone you builders rejected,

which has become the capstone."

12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

Peter preached these same facts of the gospel in Acts 5:29-32:

“. . . We must obey God rather than men! 30 The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead – whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. 32 We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

When Luke's narrative moved to cover Stephen and Philip working as evangelists, he showed them speaking the same gospel as the apostles had spoken. Stephen, on the brink of martyrdom, in Acts 7:52-53, preached the gospel:

52 Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— 53 you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it.

Philip also preached that same gospel to the Samaritans in Acts 8:12:

12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

Therefore, there is no doubt that when Philip preached "the good news about Christ," he included the facts of the gospel of Christ: How the Christ died for our sins, how he was buried, how that he was raised from the dead, and how he appeared to many witnesses of his resurrection.

What to Do to Be Saved

From Peter's instruction, the Eunuch knew that he had to be baptized. In fact, he asks the question: "Why shouldn't I be baptized?" It is necessary to infer that Peter had taught the entire truth about baptism, even though the scriptures do not tell us what he said. Jesus had commanded baptism in order to be saved when he gave the great commission in Mark 16:16: "16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." Peter had commanded baptism on the Day of Pentecost in order to receive the forgiveness of sins in Acts 2:38: "38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."

"Look, here is water," said the eunuch, necessarily inferring that he knew that the one baptism that saves is water baptism. Peter taught in 1 Peter 3:20-22:

In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, 21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand – with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

Why Shouldn't I Be Baptized?

Acts 8:36-39

36 As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" [The NIV relegates verse 37 to a foot note.] 37 Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." The eunuch answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." 38 And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly

took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.

"Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" shows the urgency and the necessity of baptism. The Philippian jailor was baptized the same hour of the night in Acts 16:33: "33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized." In Acts 22:16 Ananias told Saul of Tarsus: "16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name." Baptism is never a matter of convenience in the New Testament since one's soul's salvation depends on it.

Philip required the eunuch to make the good confession of his faith as a prerequisite to baptism. These words formalize the requirements and language of the good confession: "'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' The eunuch answered, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'" Belief in our hearts and confession with our mouths are inseparably bound to the actions that save us from our sins. Paul confirmed the necessity for belief and confession in the steps that we must take to be saved in Rom 10:9-10:

9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

The mode of baptism, which should not be debated since baptism by definition is a burial, is clear by the actions Philip and the eunuch took: they went down into the water; and Philip baptized him; and they came up out of the water. Paul makes clear the action of baptism is a burial. In Rom 6:3-4, he taught:

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

In Col 2:12, he repeated the action of baptism as a burial: "12 having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead."

After his belief and his confession of that belief and after his baptism, the eunuch went on his way rejoicing. There had come to the eunuch what Peter had described in Acts 3:19 as times of refreshing: "19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."

Acts 8:40

40 Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

16. The Conversion of Saul and Peter's Continued Work in Judea: Acts 9

Luke had paid his first attention to Saul at the stoning of Stephen, where Saul was complicit in Stephen's death. Luke recorded in Acts 7:57-58:

57 At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, 58 dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

In Acts 8:3, Luke tells how Saul had begun to persecute the church: "3 But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison. Now once again in Chapter 9, Luke finds Saul setting out to persecute the church.

Acts 9 is one of three chapters that deal with the conversion of Saul, who was later known as Paul. Paul told his story of conversion in Jerusalem where he was arrested in Acts 22. In Acts 26, Paul again told his conversion story in his defense before Agrippa. 1 Cor 15:7-9 describes how he was called and how he had persecuted the church:

7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

9 For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

Luke begins with Paul still "breathing murderous threats against the disciples."

Paul's Trip to Damascus

Acts 9:1-4

9 *Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. 3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"*

Saul had become more and more dangerous to the church and the disciples, breathing murderous threats and taking them prisoners. All of this was with the permission and authority of the high priest. Here the disciples are referred to as any "who belonged to the Way." In verse 31, they are called the church, making the Way and the church synonymous. In Acts 19:8-9, Luke again uses the words *the Way* to describe the kingdom of God, making the church, the kingdom of God, and the Way synonymous. When Paul was at Corinth, Acts 19:8-9 uses the words *the Way* to describe Paul's efforts:

8 Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. 9 But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way.

The disturbance that arose was against the Way in Acts 19:23: "23 About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way.

Paul used the expression twice in Acts 24. First in Acts 24:14, Paul said, "However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect." By implication, Paul denies the church is a sect. Second, in Acts 24:22, Luke uses the term with

Felix: "22 Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings." By the 9th chapter of Acts, the terms *church* and *Christians* had become distinctive, including both Jews and Gentile.

Suddenly, a light flashed, Saul fell to the ground, and the voice said: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

The Appearance of the Lord

Acts 9:5-9

5 *"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.*

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

In his narrative, Luke records many questions posed by those who are confronting the Lord's demands and their own frail and human needs. Those converted on the Day of Pentecost cried out, "Brothers, what shall we do?" In Acts 16:30, the Philippian jailor repeated their plaintive cry: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" The questions progress toward the need to obey. In Acts 8:37, the eunuch asked: "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" Here, Paul is in the dark, spiritually and physically, and asks the fundamental question at the dawn of his belief: "Who are you, Lord?" Ananias will put the last question in the conversion process to Paul in Acts 22:16: "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name."

The miracle assaulted Saul's senses: He was speechless and blind. The miracle was evident and powerful. There was no doubt that the Lord was demonstrating his power and confirming his word.

Saul, a Chosen Instrument

Acts 9:10-16

10 *In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"*

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

11 *The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. 12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."*

13 *"Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. 14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."*

15 *But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."*

In Damascus, the Lord also appeared to Ananias and told him about Saul and where he could be found. Ananias was frightened, for he knew that Saul had persecuted the church in

Jerusalem and had come to Damascus to seize “all who call on your name.”

The Lord also told Ananias that Saul was a chosen instrument to take his name before the Gentiles and the Jews. This forecast marks the beginning of the inclusion of the Gentiles in the spread of the gospel. However, to get the job done, the Lord will direct Peter in Acts 10 to go to Cornelius. The Lord also forecast that Saul would suffer mightily for the name of the Lord. Paul, as Saul was to be called, summarized the extent of his sufferings in the name of the Lord in 2 Cor 11:24-27:

24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. 27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

Paul, an Obedient Believer Who Begins to Preach the Gospel

Acts 9:17-22

17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord-Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here – has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. 20 At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. 21 All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" 22 Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.

The miracle on the road to Damascus is important for what it did not do. It did not give Paul the gift of the Holy Spirit, and it did not save him. When Ananias said that the Lord sent Paul to him to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and when Paul got up and was baptized, they fulfilled exactly the command of Peter on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:38:

Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The exact words of Ananias in his command to Saul show the culmination of belief that baptism washes away sins: “16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name (Acts 22:16).”

Paul began immediately to preach the gospel. The disciples were astonished: after all, Saul had “raised havoc” among the Christians and he had come to Damascus to take Christians prisoner. Saul grew more powerful in proving to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. Paul’s power was in the word he preached and not the miracle that happened to him or those miracles that he would do himself. He would write later in Rom 1:16-16:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

Paul's Trip to Jerusalem

Acts 9:23-30

23 After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him, 24 but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. 25 But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

26 When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. 28 So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. 29 He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him. 30 When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

Paul's work in Damascus was short lived as the Jews conspired to kill him. Paul adds more detail to this plot on his life and his subsequent escape in 2 Cor 11:32-33:

32 In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. 33 But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands.

In Jerusalem, Barnabas was the main person helping him. This is the Barnabas that Luke first described in Acts 4:36-37: "

36 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), 37 sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

Barnabas will be a constant companion for Paul during his missionary journeys. Luke mentions Barnabas 34 times in Acts. Most notably is the occasion where Barnabas went to Taurus and brought Paul back to preach in Antioch in Acts 11:25-26:

25 Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

Luke closes this episode in Paul's life by reporting his flight from the Grecian Jews in Jerusalem to Tarsus.

Peter and the Churches of Judea, Galilee, and Samaria

Acts 9:31

31 Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.

Luke's narrative turns back to events in the life of Peter. With Paul now a Christian, persecution subsides and the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria experiences a time of peace. The church grew in strength and numbers as it was encouraged by the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, God equipped the church to grow and by strong; and in the early church that came through the spiritual gifts bestowed by the laying on of an apostle's hands [see notes on chapter 8]. Paul describes this manifestation of the Spirit in the church in 1 Cor 12:27-28:

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. 28 And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.

However, Paul also described how these gifts would cease with the complete revelation of the will of God in writing. In 1 Cor 13:8-10, he taught:

But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.

According to James and Paul, the scriptures are that perfect law. James spoke of the word of God as the perfect law in James 1:25:

25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does.

Paul teaches that the scriptures are complete and thoroughly equip the man of God. 2 Tim 3:16-17 reads:

16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

If Christians today live in respect (fear) of God, and follow his word in the New Testament, they too will grow in spirit and numbers. God so constructed the church that it would be complete with the apostles and prophets before the written word was complete. The Church is complete in our time with evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Eph 4:11-13 speaks of the church when the apostles and those with spiritual gifts were active; and it also speaks of the church after the apostles and those on whom they laid their hands had passed away. Whether when the apostles were present or after their demise, the church, the body of Christ was complete:

11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Acts 9:32-35

32 As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the saints in Lydda. 33 There he found a man named Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years. 34 "Aeneas," Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your mat." Immediately Aeneas got up. 35 All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

Aeneas, a paralytic man who was healed is another example of the signs and miracles that followed the apostles, confirming the word that they taught. It still remained to those who heard to turn to the Lord, as in every other case of conversion.

Acts 9:36-42

36 In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor. 37 About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. 38 Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that

Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"

39 Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

40 Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. 41 He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive. 42 This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. 43 Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

Acts 9 closes with Peter, through the power of the Holy Spirit, healing Dorcas. In her own right, Dorcas was a wonderful example of a Christian doing good works. Indeed, all Christians are to so live, following her example. According to Paul in Gal 6:8-10, all Christians should nurture the proverbial Dorcas within us:

8 The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. 9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Regardless of how good Dorcas was, the power of the Holy Spirit did not raise her from the dead to accommodate and reward her for her good works. Nor did the Spirit raise her to respond to the sadness and sorrow of her fellow Christians. The power of the Spirit came to bear on the case of Dorcas in order that the word might be confirmed as the word of God, so that when "This became known all over Joppa, . . . many people believed in the Lord."

Miracles in the New Testament were never to accommodate.

Peter, who stayed in Joppa, will be the one to take the gospel to Gentiles in Acts 10.

17. The Conversion of Cornelius and the Gentiles: Acts 10

Prior to Acts 10, the spread of the gospel followed through Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. In Acts 2, Jews from all over the world heard the gospel. In Acts 3, Peter preached the same gospel to the crippled and lame. In Acts 8, Philip preached to the Samaritans. Acts 9 closed with Peter in Joppa after working to spread the gospel to Judea. Now in Acts 10, the gospel goes to the Gentiles (the nations), making it available to everyone. The fulfillment of the great commission was at hand. Jesus had said in Matt 28:19-20:

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

Indeed, Jesus had forecast that the gospel would go to the ends of the earth in Acts 1:8; "8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The last lesson left Peter in Joppa at the house of Simon the tanner according to Acts 9:43: "43 Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon." Joppa was a town on the Mediterranean Sea 35 miles south of Caesarea which was the capitol of the Roman province of Judea. It was the seat of government and the headquarters of Roman troops.

A Man Named Cornelius

Acts 10:1-3

10 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. 2 He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. 3 One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!"

Cornelius, as a centurion, was in charge of 100 men in the Italian regiment. In that day, Italy was only a province that surrounded Rome. When Cornelius and those converted with him went home, they would be in the most strategic place possible to spread the gospel *to the ends of the earth*—east to Spain, north to Gaul, and west to Greece. Rome and the province of Italy were the crossroads of the world.

Cornelius' character made him at once a God-fearing and moral man. That this good man needed the gospel in order to be saved testifies to what all such people must do to be saved. When the angel of the Lord addressed Cornelius, it started the sequence of events that would lead to the conversion of the Gentiles, but it alone did not save him.

Acts 10:4-8

4 Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked.

The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. 5 Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. 6 He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea."

Cornelius' prayers and gifts did not save him; nor did God answer his prayer. The word *memorial* means "serving to preserve remembrance." Cornelius' good life, prayers, and gifts served to preserve God's remembrance of him. A man healed by Jesus declared in John 9:31, "31 We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his

will." God hears and remembers the prayers and alms of godly people; however that they all must obey the gospel to be saved. Cornelius and all moral people must be open to hear and obey the gospel of Christ. Jesus taught in Matt 7:7-8:

7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

Acts 10:7

7 When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. 8 He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

Cornelius' asking, seeking, and knocking required him to send men to bring Peter from Joppa.

Peter's Vision

Acts 10:9-16

9 About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. 10 He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. 11 He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. 12 It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. 13 Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

14 "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

15 The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

16 This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

Peter's vision was to convince him that Gentiles were not unclean. It was against the Jewish law to even associate with a Gentile. To persuade Peter otherwise, God used the analogy to food. Under the Law of Moses, God had restricted the Jews from eating certain foods. Leviticus 11 details these restrictions, which some think God instituted to impose health regulations on the Hebrews. For example, we now know that pork easily spoils. God was clear in his requirement that unclean things could not be eaten in Lev 11:46-47:

46 "These are the regulations concerning animals, birds, every living thing that moves in the water and every creature that moves about on the ground. 47 You must distinguish between the unclean and the clean, between living creatures that may be eaten and those that may not be eaten."

Peter was told three times: "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." The application of the vision becomes obvious to Peter when he must apply the teaching to the Gentiles and their right to hear and obey the gospel.

Peter Receives the Men Sent by Cornelius

Acts 10:17-23a

17 While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. 18 They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.

19 While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. 20 So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them."

21 Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?"

22 The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say." 23 Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

As the narrative unfolds and the men tell Peter why they are there, they include a statement that shows the purpose of the vision, and indeed, what this episode teaches Peter and the rest of us. Peter asked them, "Why have you come?" The men replied telling him what the angel had said: "A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say." All the visions aside, Cornelius had to hear the gospel and obey it to be saved. It is so in all the cases of conversion.

Peter Goes to Caesarea to See Cornelius

Acts 10:23b-26

The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went along. 24 The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. 25 As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. 26 But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself."

Cornelius greeted Peter with great respect, assembling relatives and friends to meet and hear him. When he fell down to worship Peter, Peter stopped him, making him stand up. When John responded similarly to an angel in Rev 22:8-9, he too was rebuked:

And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. 9 But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"

Today, clerics and ecclesiastics of all stripes adorn themselves in elaborate garments and assume pious posturing to set themselves forward as someone approaching the divine. They take titles; such as, reverend and father. They people created by God to demean themselves as they bow and scrape and kiss hands and the rings on them.

People today willfully forget the teaching of Jesus in Matt 23:5-6;9-12:

5 "Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; 6 they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; . . .

. . . 9 And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. 10 Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ. 11 The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

Neither Peter nor John's angel from heaven made this arrogant mistake. "Stand up!" Peter commanded. "Worship God!" concluded the angel.

Acts 10:27-29

27 Talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. 28 He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. 29 So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"

Peter understood the message of his vision: Do not call any man impure or unclean. Paul repeatedly asserted that the gospel—wide as possible in scope—included all people. Gal 3:28-29 teaches:

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Peter spoke, but did not follow, words that were all-inclusive in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:39: “39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.” One of the great stories of the Cornelius episode is how Peter could open himself so quickly to accept and preach to the Gentiles. The answer to Peter’s question, “May I ask why you sent for me?” is key to understanding how the Lord calls people.

Acts 10:30-33

30 *Cornelius answered: "Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me 31 and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. 32 Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.' 33 So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."*

Cornelius’ answer to Peter reiterated what had happened to him and how he had immediately sent for Peter; but he also gave the reason: “to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.” This scene plays out exactly what Paul teaches must happen in order for faith to grow. In Rom 10:14, he wrote, “14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?” Certainly, Cornelius, and all men, must hear the gospel before they can believe the gospel.

The stage is set for Peter to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

Peter Preaches the Gospel

Acts 10:34-38

34 *Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism 35 but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. 36 You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. 37 You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached – 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him."*

Peter begins by stating what he has just accepted: God does not show favoritism but accepts all men who fear him and do what is right. Our generation has its own special problems with accepting that the gospel is for all: all races, all heritages, all incomes, all legal statuses, all sexes, and even all those of opposing religions. Yes, all men have the right to hear the gospel of Jesus and obey it, and we have the obligation to take it to them.

Peter follows with a summary of what had transpired as John the Baptist and Jesus preached the good news throughout Judea. The very language—“the baptism that John preached”—separates and makes a difference between the baptism of John and the baptism of Jesus. This difference will continue to be made throughout Acts. In Acts 18 and 19, Apollos and certain

Corinthians knew only the baptism of John. That they were baptized again, this time in the name of Jesus, shows that the baptism of John is not the baptism that saves. Acts 19:4-5 reports:

4 Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." 5 On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

Act 10:39-43

39 "We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, 40 but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. 41 He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen – by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. 43 All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Peter preached the same gospel to Cornelius and his cohorts that he preached on the Day of Pentecost. Every occasion of preaching the gospel in Acts teaches this same message. Christ died for our sins: they hanged him on a tree. He was buried. God raised him from the dead. He was seen because God caused him to be seen. God chose the witnesses who saw him, and they were to preach. They preached that Christ will judge all men, the living and the dead. However, "everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

The First Gentile Converts

Acts 10:44-47

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. 45 The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. 46 For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter said, 47 "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have."

The Holy Spirit descended upon these Gentiles in the same way that it had descended on the apostles in Acts 2. [See notes: 3. The Holy Spirit Comes with Power; This Is What Was Spoken: Acts 2:1-21, for a discussion of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.] Peter said plainly that they had received the Holy Spirit just as the apostles had. They spoke in tongues to demonstrate that power of the Spirit.

Peter's response came quickly and unequivocally: "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water?" Peter, thus distinguished between the coming of the Holy Spirit which confirmed the word and will of God and water baptism which saves. Peter wrote later in 1 Peter 3:21:

21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Acts 10:48

48 So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

By ordering that they be baptized, Peter proves that baptism is not optional but essential to salvation. This conversion of Gentiles opens the whole world to the gospel of Jesus. With little exception, Luke turns his narrative to the spread of the gospel throughout the Roman world and even beyond.

Paul's experience caused him to shed the vestiges of the Old Covenant still lingering and accept that the Gentiles were God's children. In staying with them for a few days, he illustrated the completeness of his changed view. He had realized the fruition of his words in Acts 2: "the promise is to . . . all them that are afar off."

Acts 11 will begin with Peter having to defend himself for eating with the Gentiles when he arrives back in Jerusalem.

18. Peter Reports and the Gospel Goes to Greeks in Antioch: Acts 11

The last lesson, covering the conversion of Cornelius' house and the taking of the gospel to the Gentiles, closed with Peter baptizing Cornelius and his household in Acts 10:46b-48a:

Then Peter said, 47 "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." 48 So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Following the conversions, Peter stayed on a few days (Acts 10:48b). Chapter 11 begins with the response of the church at Jerusalem to this violation of Jewish custom and law; i.e., eating with the Gentiles.

Peter Criticized for Eating with Gentiles

Acts 11:1-3

11 The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. 2 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him 3 and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them."

One might say that the news of the gospel going to the Gentiles, spread, even before Peter could get back to Jerusalem. The message that had spread so rapidly was not that these Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit, but it was the message that the Gentiles had received the word of God. The focus of the passage is on the power of the word of God.

What happened to the Gentiles is exactly what happened to the Jews on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:41:

40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." 41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Salvation's power is in the word of God and in the believers' belief and obedience to the word. Paul described how the power is in the word of truth, the gospel in Eph 1:13, "13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation." Paul also applied this power of the gospel to Jew and Gentile alike in Rom 1:16: "16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile."

Evidently, the Jewish Christians had more of a problem with Paul's eating with the Gentiles than he had with the Gentiles hearing and obeying the gospel.

Acts 11:4-18

4 Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened: 5 "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. 6 I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds of the air. 7 Then I heard a voice telling me, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.'

8 "I replied, 'Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.'

9 "The voice spoke from heaven a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.'

10 This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.

11 "Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. 12 The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man's house. 13 He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. 14 He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.'

15 "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. 16 Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' 17 So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?"

18 When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life."

The story told in these verses is essentially the same as the story in Acts 10. However, this account, as told by Peter, shows very clearly the role of the word in their conversion and the role of the Holy Spirit in their conversion. Verse 14 states directly the role of the word of the gospel in their conversion: "14 He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved."

Peter also explained in precise words the role of the Holy Spirit in verse 17: "So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?"

The response of the Christians in Jerusalem confirms this understanding of how the word of the gospel is the instrument of power in conversion. This episode ends with the Christians in Jerusalem saying that God had "granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life."

The Gospel Goes to Greeks in Antioch

Acts 11:19-21

19 Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. 20 Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. 21 The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

In Acts 8:2-4, Luke described how the Christians were scattered abroad at the persecution following Stephen's stoning:

2 Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. 3 But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

4 Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.



The map shows that while some of the scattered Christians went to Antioch. It was those who went first to Cyprus and Cyrene who then went to Antioch and preached to Greeks who would have been Gentiles. The message to these Greeks was the same—the good news about the Lord Jesus. The response of the people was also the same—they believed and turned to the Lord.

This event is just one of many events, which fulfill the words of Jesus in Acts 1:8: “. . .you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 11:22-24

22 News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23 When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. 24 He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

Luke introduced Barnabas, a strong worker in the church, in Acts 4:36-37, where Barnabas’ demonstrated charity by his gift to help those less fortunate:

36 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), 37 sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.”

Barnabas had also paved the way for Saul to meet with the apostles when he returned to Jerusalem after his conversion in Acts 9:27:

27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.

Here, Luke describes Barnabas as “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith.” He encouraged the church to remain true to the Lord and he brought many people to the Lord.

The Disciples Called Christians First at Antioch

Acts 11:25-26

25 Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

Perhaps the most important accomplishment for Barnabas was that he went to Tarsus and brought Saul back. From Antioch, Paul will launch many great efforts to preach the gospel.

Most importantly in this passage is the fact that the “disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.” Jesus charged his apostles to make disciples when he commissioned them in Matt 28:19-20:

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

Christian is the new name prophesied for the New Jerusalem in Isa 62:2:

2 The nations will see your righteousness,
and all kings your glory;
you will be called by a new name

that the mouth of the Lord will bestow.

This entire chapter describes the New Jerusalem and parallels the following references in the Revelation. Isaiah forecasts what is to come and the Revelation teaches what has happened when the revelation is complete.

In Antioch and from Antioch, the Gentiles became disciples and the nations saw the glory of the righteousness of God. The name, *Christian*, has lost its specific meaning and finds only general use; i.e., a *Christian* nation. Religious individuals go by denominational names and not by the once specific name, but now made general name, *Christian*. Receiving the name, *Christian*, means that we are uncompromising slaves of Christ. Only members of the Lord's church so faithfully go by this name, *Christian*. The idea that the name was given as a derogatory name is inconsistent with the facts, since neither Jews nor Gentiles would have so elevated Jesus as the Christ and master [See Notes on the Revelation, www.gospellessons.info].

Only New Testament Christians of the first century and those New Testament Christians of today, who insist on that name and that name alone, know the full implications of that name. Rev 2:17 teaches, "To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it." The name of Christ (Christian) is the name of those disciples who follow only Jesus. The name of Jesus is the name of the only church made up of Christians (the church of Christ). Rev 3:12-13 draws together all these names in one single statement:

I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.

Mount Zion, the New Jerusalem, and the church of Christ are the same according to Heb 12:22-24:

22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

The church of the firstborn is the church of Christ. John described Jesus as the firstborn in Rev 1:5: ". . . Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. Paul also identifies Jesus as the firstborn in Col 1:18: "And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy."

Peter teaches us that this name is to the praise of God in 1 Peter 4:16: "16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name."

The new name Christian of Antioch of old is the new name Christian used only in a specific way by members of the body of Christ, the church of Christ, today. Only those who use the name Christian in this New Testament way know its meaning.

The Worldwide Famine

Acts 11:27-30

27 During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) 29 The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. 30 This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

The famine predicted by Agabus was to be worldwide. The decision to send help to the brothers in Judea was a decision by a church of Gentile Christians to help churches of Jewish Christians. Thus, the Gentile Christians continued to manifest the benevolent spirit first shown among the Christians throughout Acts, but beginning in Jerusalem in Acts 2:44-45: "44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Appropriately, the Antioch church sent their help to the elders of the churches of Judea. They chose Barnabas and Saul to carry out this task.

Agabus will appear and prophesy one more time when Paul is returning to Jerusalem. In Caesarea, they stayed in the house of Philip the evangelist when Agabus came down from Jerusalem. He came over to Paul and took his belt, tied his hands and feet with it and said: "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

19. Herod Brings Persecution against the Church: Acts 12

In the last lesson, Agabus had prophesied a worldwide famine. The church in Antioch, composed mostly of Gentile Christians, determined to help the churches of Judea. Appropriately, the Antioch church sent their financial help to the elders of the churches of Judea. They chose Barnabas and Saul to carry out this task. Chapter 12 begins with simultaneous events affecting the churches of Judea and the church in Jerusalem. These startling events begin with King Herod bringing persecution against those who belonged to the church.

Herod Brings Persecution to the Church

Acts 12:1-5

12 It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. 2 He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. 3 When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. 4 After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

5 So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

The King Herod spoken of here is the second of two Herods reigning during the life of Jesus and the time of the early church. They were tetrarchs appointed by Rome to govern Judea. The New Testament only mentions them in relation to the terrible acts against Christ and his church. Since the Romans appointed the first Herod, the Jews always took him to be an interloper and not a Jew and certainly not of the house of David. That Jesus was born king of the Jews threatened Herod the father (Matt 2:1-3). Since an angel warned Joseph to flee to Egypt, Herod was unsuccessful in finding the child. He was furious (Matt 2:16-18): “. . . he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.”

The King Herod in Acts 12 was himself associated with the worst of acts against Christ and the church. Mark 6:24-29 records how he killed John the Baptist. According to Acts 4:27 he conspired with Pilate to kill the Lord Jesus: “27 Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.” Herod continues his sneaky ways now in chapter 12.

His aim here is to persecute the church by seizing Christians. The worst of his deeds was to kill James the apostle with the sword. Encouraged by the effect this had on the Jews, he seized Peter. While they waited for public trial after the Passover, sixteen soldiers guarded Peter, making escape impossible without divine intervention. Clearly, Herod was expecting to make a public display and further please the Jews.

In the meantime, the church was earnestly praying for Peter.

Peter Delivered by an Angel

Acts 12:6-7

6 The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. 7 Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said,

and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.

Peter is securely bound to two soldiers and others are standing guard. To free him will take intervention by God's angel, which happens for the second time, according to Luke's record. The first happened in Acts 5:19-20, when the Jews arrested Peter for defying their order not to preach or teach in the name of Jesus:

19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. 20 "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this new life."

Miraculously, the chains fell off.

Acts 12:8-10

8 Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." And Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him. 9 Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. 10 They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

The miraculous intervention by the angel is so great that Peter thought he was seeing a vision. Suddenly the angel was gone. To those who will later learn of this miracle, there is no doubt about the angel's miraculous intervention.

Acts 12:11

11 Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating."

Peter was certain that an angel of the Lord had rescued him.

Peter Returns to the Disciples

Acts 12:12-14

12 When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. 13 Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door. 14 When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!"

A great lesson is available to the church today. These early Christians had gathered together and were praying, knowing that Peter was in an extreme situation. Today, Christians should meet adversity in the same manner. These examples and the explicit teaching of the Spirit demand it of us. James summarized the power of prayer in James 5:16, "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." Peter quoted Ps 34:12-16 in 1 Peter 3:12:

12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous
and his ears are attentive to their prayer,

Acts 12:15-17

15 "You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, "It must be his angel."

16 But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. 17

Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. "Tell James and the brothers about this," he said, and then he left for another place.

When Peter told his story, he credited the Lord with his escape, showing that the Lord had used the angel. James here is most likely James the brother of Jesus, who played a prominent role in the early church. Of course, Herod had killed James the brother of John with the sword in the first of the chapter.

The lesson to those listening to Peter and to us today is that the angels of God can aid us in seemingly impossible situations. The Hebrew writer taught that the angels serve the believers in Heb 1:14: "14 Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"

Herod's Response and Fate

Acts 12:18-19a

18 In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. 19 After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.

The execution of the guards who lost a prisoner was common in that day. That the guards were in such jeopardy testifies to the authenticity of this miracle. With their very lives at risk, the guards would not have conspired to free Peter.

Acts 12:19b-20

Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there a while. 20 He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. Having secured the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king's country for their food supply.

Historically, the Herods were weak rulers prone to do evil more than good. Here is a good example, reaching even beyond the killing of James to allow subjects to worship him as a god. The people of Tyre and Sidon sued for peace because they depended on the king's country for their food supply.

Acts 12:21-23

21 On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. 22 They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." 23 Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.

They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." Herod let them praise him as if he were God, and he did not praise God himself. His fate was as final as it was shocking: God struck him down, worms ate him, and he died. The structure of the sentence indicates that Herod dies because he was eaten by worms—a sordid death. Jesus uses the same metaphor for life after death for the wicked in Mark 9:47-49:

It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, 48 where

“their worm does not die,
and the fire is not quenched.”

49 Everyone will be salted with fire.

24 *But the word of God continued to increase and spread.*

Regardless of the difficulties, trials, and persecutions, the word will always increase and spread.

Barnabas and Paul Return to Antioch

Acts 12:25

25 *When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.*

In meantime, Barnabas and Paul completed their mission and returned to Antioch. John Mark, whom they took with them, will become important as Paul begins his missionary journeys. The story of Mark becomes an important subplot in the life of Paul. He went with Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey. In Acts 13:5, Mark is described as their helper: “5 When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.” However, in Acts 13:13, he turned back: “13 From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.” Because he turned back, Paul refused to take him on the second journey in Acts 15:37-40:

37 Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, 38 but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. 39 They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, 40 but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.

However, Mark returned to be a great helper while Paul was in prison in Col 4:10: “My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)” Finally, Paul makes a special request that Timothy bring Mark to Paul, for he is useful in Paul’s ministry. 2 Tim 4:11 teaches: “Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.”

Their mission had been to take aid to the churches of Judea, as ordered by the church at Antioch. The previous chapter closed as they departed on this mission. Acts 11:27-30 gives the details:

27 During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) 29 The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. 30 This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

20. Paul and Barnabas Take the Gospel to Asia Minor: Acts 13

Acts 12 closed with Barnabas and Paul returning to Antioch, taking John Mark with them. Acts 13 marks a new beginning in the spread of the gospel, as Paul and his companions embark on Paul's first missionary journey. On this journey, Luke will write in the third person, indicating that he did not accompany Paul and Barnabas. However, by the second journey, Luke speaks in the first person, indicating that he was with Paul. Acts 16:10 Luke uses *we* and *us*: "10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them."

Paul and Barnabas Sent

Acts 13:1-3

1 In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. 2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3 So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

The church at Antioch had in her membership inspired prophets. The notes on Acts 8 fully discuss how the apostles imparted spiritual gifts in the early church. Here we see these prophets and teachers actually at work in the early church. A brief review is in order. Paul describes the purpose of these inspired people in Eph 4:11-13:

11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Uninspired evangelists (preachers), pastors (also called elders, overseers, and bishops), and teachers continue in the church today. However, those whose work depended on inspiration of the Spirit ceased. Paul taught this explicitly in 1 Cor 13:8: "8 Love never fails. But where there are **prophecies, they will cease**; where there are **tongues, they will be stilled**; where there is **knowledge, it will pass away**." [Emphasis added.]

The Spirit, through these inspired men, directly ordered that the church set aside Barnabas and Saul to the work that is to follow – their first missionary journey. The role of the church in Antioch is extremely important, relating both to the oversight of the work they were to do and to the support of that work. Rom 10:14-15 further explains the obligation of churches to send:

14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can they preach unless they are sent?

Acts 13:4-5

4 The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. 5 When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues.

John was with them as their helper.

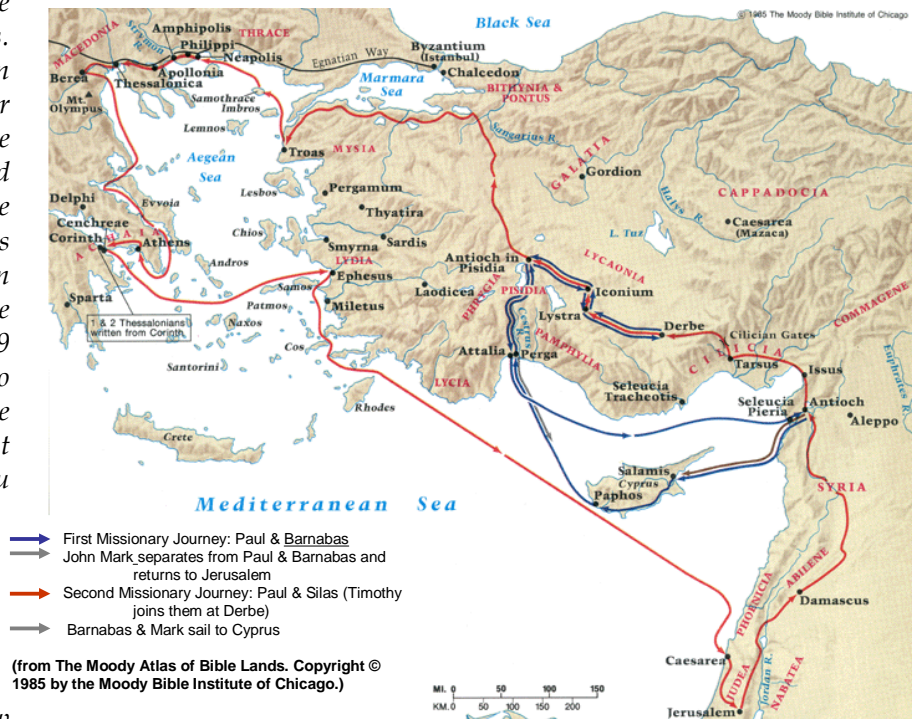
The Holy Spirit, who ordered the church, is the one who actually sent them. Thus, the author of the order was the Holy Spirit with the church executing that order. They sailed from the seaport of Seleucia to Salamis on the island of Cyprus.

Paul and Barnabas in Paphos

Acts 13:6-11a

6 They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, 7 who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. 8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. 9 Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, 10 "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? 11 Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun."

Paul's First and Second Journeys



In Paphos, they met two people of very different motivation. The Jewish sorcerer, named Bar-Jesus or Elymas, had a financial stake as an attendant to the proconsul. On the other hand, the proconsul wanted to hear the word of God. Therefore, Elymas tried to oppose the preachers and turn the proconsul from the faith. Paul was vehement in his response, calling him a son of the devil and the enemy of everything that is right. In John 8:44, Jesus had also criticized the Jews for a similar heart:

44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Peter had used similar language in describing the fallen Simon in Acts 8:21-23:

21 You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. 22 Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you

for having such a thought in your heart. 23 For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

Such language is reserved for those who pervert the "right ways of the Lord." For all this, Elymas was going to be blind for a time.

Acts 13:11b-12

Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. 12 When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

Immediately, he was blind. The proconsul was witness to the miracle, but he was amazed at the teaching of the Lord. Once again, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God." People today might say, "If I could just see a miracle." Miracles in the New Testament only confirmed the word of God. The wonder of wonders is the good news of Jesus risen from the dead, our sins washed away by his blood, and a hope of life eternal for those who believe and obey. Now that is a miracle of great amazement.

The proconsul follows the same path as those on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. When they heard the gospel, they were pricked in their hearts. When the Samaritans heard Philip preach in Acts 8:22, they believed: "22 But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." When the eunuch heard Philip preach Jesus, he immediately responded in Acts 8:36, "'Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?'" Immediacy and urgency are always the watchwords in conversion—once it happens, the response follows quickly. Paul is an excellent example of what must follow belief of the gospel in Acts 22:16: "16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name." So it was with the proconsul.

Perga in Pamphylia and Pisidian Antioch

Acts 13:13-15

13 From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. 14 From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. 15 After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak."

From Paphos on Cyprus, they landed at Perga, where John turned back. The notes on Acts 12:25 discuss the turning back of John, Paul's refusal to take him on the second journey, and John's eventual restoration as Paul's true and faithful fellow worker.

As will be the custom, Paul and his companions went to the Jews first, finding them at the synagogue on the Sabbath. The leaders asked them to speak. The sermon that Paul now preaches ranks with Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost and Stephen's sermon in his defense and in the defense of the gospel. The sermon is a comprehensive statement of why the Jews should turn to the gospel.

Paul Preaches

Acts 13:16-20a

16 Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: "Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship

God, listen to me! 17 The God of the people of Israel chose our fathers; he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt, with mighty power he led them out of that country, 18 he endured their conduct for about forty years in the desert, 19 he overthrew seven nations in Canaan and gave their land to his people as their inheritance. 20 All this took about 450 years.

Paul covers 450 years of Jewish history in these 89 words. Of course, Men of Israel and Gentiles who worship God would know this history, which was read on the Sabbath days in the synagogues.

Acts 13:20b-22

"After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. 21 Then the people asked for a king, and he gave them Saul son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled forty years. 22 After removing Saul, he made David their king. He testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.'

In this brief paragraph, Paul covers the time of the judges to David, the king after God's own heart. The people who asked for a king, departed from God's plan in 1 Sam 8:4-8:

4 So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. 5 They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have."

6 But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. 7 And the Lord told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king."

Paul quotes 1 Sam 13:14 where God speaks of David as a man after his own heart: "14 But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the Lord's command."

This is the first recorded sermon where Paul addresses a joint Jewish and Gentile audience on his journey. The only other place that "after my own heart" appears is prophetically speaking of shepherds (elders, bishops) in the church, the New Jerusalem, when Jew and Gentile alike gather. Jer 3:14-17 reads:

14 "Return, faithless people," declares the Lord, "for I am your husband. I will choose you . . . and bring you to Zion. 15 Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding. 16 In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land," declares the Lord, "men will no longer say, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord.' It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made. 17 At that time, they will call Jerusalem the Throne of the Lord, **and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honor the name of the Lord.**

As Paul addresses this joint audience, the old covenant has passed away, and the new covenant includes all nations. In the next chapter, Paul will fulfill this prophecy as he appoints elders (shepherds, overseers) in every church. Acts 14:23 reads, "Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust."

That shepherds and elders are these men after God's heart is evident in Acts 20:17; 28:

17 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the **elders** of the church. . . .

28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**. Be **shepherds** of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

Acts 13:23-25

23 "From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised. 24 Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel. 25 As John was completing his work, he said: 'Who do you think I am? I am not that one. No, but he is coming after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.'

Paul's sermon turns to the Savior Jesus, born of the seed of David, just as God had promised. He tells them of the work of John who was by his own admission less than Jesus. John had forecast the coming of Jesus and prepared his way. In Acts 19:4-5, Paul explains the insufficiency of the baptism of John:

4 Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." 5 On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

Acts 13:26-31

26 "Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. 27 The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. 28 Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. 29 When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. 30 But God raised him from the dead, 31 and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.

As in all the sermons recorded in Acts, Paul's sermon preaches the good news of the death, burial, resurrection, and appearance after death of Jesus: They executed him, they laid him in a tomb, but God raised him from the dead. Because of his appearances on many days and in many places, there were many witnesses among the people.

Thus, Paul preached the gospel just as the other preachers, and he outlined it for us in 1 Cor 15:1-8:

15 Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

Acts 13:32-36

32 "We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers 33 he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm:

"'You are my Son;
today I have become your Father.'

34 The fact that God raised him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words:

"'I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.'

35 So it is stated elsewhere:

"You will not let your Holy One see decay."

36 "For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed. 37 But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.

The good news is clearly stated: God fulfilled his promise to the fathers by raising up Jesus; he will never see decay; but David did see decay.

Acts 13:38-41

38 "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. 39 Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. 40 Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you:

41 *"Look, you scoffers,
wonder and perish,
for I am going to do something in your days
that you would never believe,
even if someone told you."*

Through this Jesus, forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to us and we are justified from everything. The law of Moses could not do this. Be careful. Scoffers will wonder and perish.

Acts 13:42-43

42 As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. 43 When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

The people wanted to hear more and asked them to speak further on the next Sabbath. Many Jews and devout converts followed them.

The Jews Become Jealous of Paul and Barnabas

Acts 13:44-47

44 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. 45 When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.

46 Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. 47 For this is what the Lord has commanded us:

*"I have made you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."*

With almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord, as one might expect, the Jews were filled with jealousy and spoke abusively about what Paul preached. According to Paul, these Jews rejected the word of God, and in doing so, considered themselves unworthy of eternal life. Therefore, it is so today: to reject the word of God is to reject eternal life.

Paul turned to the Gentiles fulfilling the prophecy that salvation was to go to the ends of the world.

Acts 13:48

48 When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

There are two wonderful phrases in this verse: *they honored the word of God* and *who were appointed to eternal life*. To honor the word of God is to take it into the heart and obey. Peter explained in 1 Peter 1:22-23:

22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. 23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

Purification from sins and the new birth depend on the living and enduring word of God, but that word must be honored by obeying it. Those who do obey the truth are those who have been appointed for eternal life. Paul explained this appointment by God through his word, the gospel, in 2 Thess 2:13b-15:

. . . from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through **belief in the truth**. 14 He called you to this through **our gospel**, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the **teachings** we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

Acts 13:49-52

49 The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. 50 But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. 51 So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

In hindsight, the results of this first major effort in Asia Minor seem predictable. Remembering the parable of the sower (Matt 13:18-23) shows how the word of God spreads. The spread here was apparently like the spread in Acts 8 when the persecuted Christians went everywhere preaching the gospel. The jealous Jews stirred up the important people – women of high standing and leading men – against Paul and Barnabas. Having been expelled from the region, they shook the dust off their feet in protest. When the Lord gave the limited commission, he told the disciples to do this very thing in Matt 10:14-15:

14 If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. 15 I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

Finally, the disciples who were left behind in Pisidian Antioch were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit – an exact replay of what Peter said should happen in Acts 2:38: “38 Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” In Acts 3:19-20, Peter describes this joy as times of refreshing: “19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, 20 and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus.” Upon his conversion, the eunuch rejoiced in Acts 8:38-39:

38 And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water,

the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.

What wonderful and exciting events Luke records for us in Acts 13.

21. Paul and Barnabas Complete the First Missionary Journey: Acts 14

In the first part of this journey, Paul and Barnabas had visited Cyprus, where the proconsul was converted to the Lord. Following this, they sailed to Perga, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. After this, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and Paul preached a powerful sermon, with many believing upon the Lord. The gospel spread through the whole region. The Jews incited the people against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them from the region. Luke reported the outcome in Acts 13:51-52: "51 So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." Chapter 14 opens with Paul and his company in Iconium. In the apostolic period, Iconium was one of the chief cities in the southern part of the Roman province of Galatia, and it probably belonged to the "Phrygian region" mentioned in Acts 16:6:

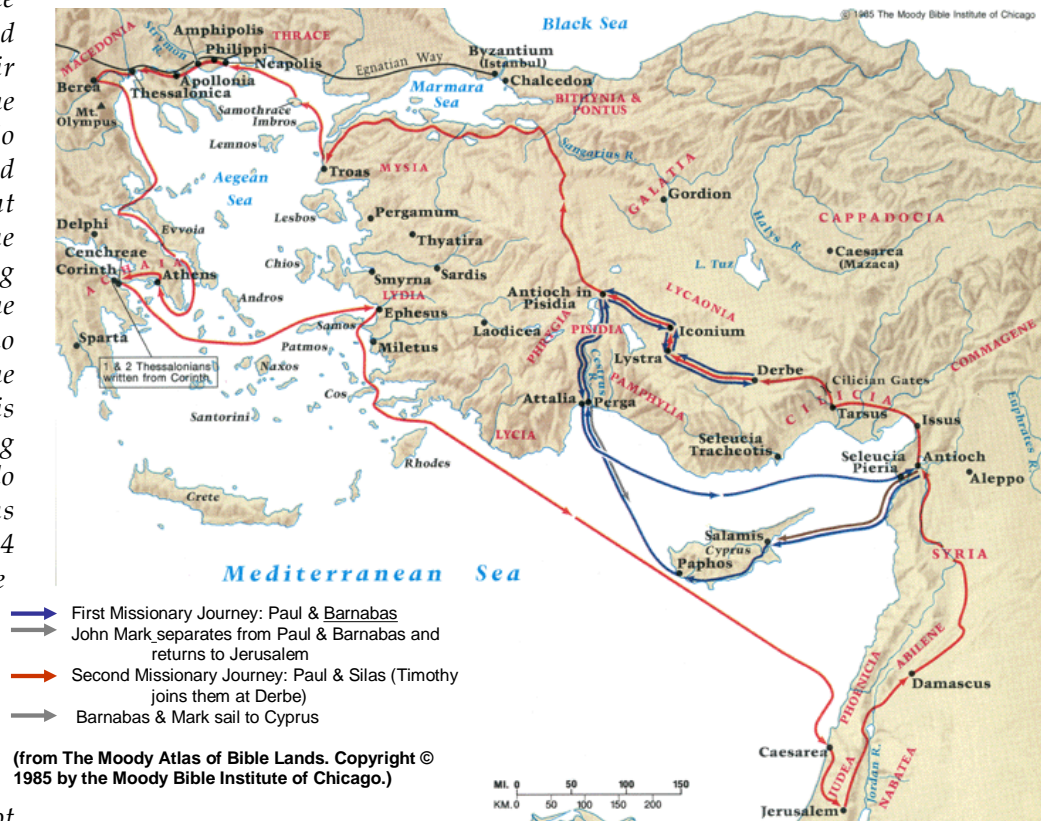
6 Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.

The border of Phrygia ran between Iconium and Lystra, 18 miles to the south. In the apostolic period, Iconium was still a Hellenic (Greek influence) city with a strong Roman influence.

Paul and Barnabas Preach Boldly at Iconium

Acts 14

1 At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. 2 But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. 3 So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders. 4 The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. 5 There was a plot afoot among the Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. 6 But



they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, 7 where they continued to preach the good news.

By now, it has become customary for Paul and Barnabas to go first to the Jewish synagogue. They spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. This is a testimony to the power of the gospel, the word of truth, for Paul later testified to his own weakness of speech. He said in 1 Cor 2:1, 3-5:

. . . I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. . . . 3 I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. 4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, 5 so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

In 1 Cor 1:18, Paul declared that the power of God is the message of the cross: "18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Rom 1:16 gives this power to the gospel: "16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes."

Once again, the Jews that did not believe stirred up the people against the brothers. However, Paul and Barnabas stuck it out, spoke boldly the world of God, and confirmed the message with signs and wonders. When they found out about a plot to stone them, they fled to Lystra and Derbe and the surrounding countryside, continuing to preach the gospel.

Paul, First Thought of as a God, Is Then Stoned at Lystra

Acts 14:8-10

8 In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. 9 He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed 10 and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

No matter the testimony, no matter the miracles, and no matter the adulation and praise, all of this goes out the window, as it were, when people harden their hearts against the Lord. This miracle is evident, of great magnitude, and of certain consequence: the man, crippled from birth, had never walked. Paul recognized the belief of the man. When Paul called out to him to stand up, he jumped up and began to walk.

Acts 14:11-13

11 When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" 12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. 13 The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.

The Lystra people credited Paul and Barnabas as being the gods Hermes (Paul was the main speaker) and Zeus. So convinced they were that the priest of Zeus brought bulls and wreaths in order to sacrifice to them. Hermes was the Greek god who served as herald and messenger of the other gods. His Roman equivalent was Mercury. Zeus, whose temple was outside the city, was considered the king of the gods. The King James version uses the word *Jupiter* for Zeus.

The point to notice here is that the people were so enamored of Paul and Barnabas that they tried to make gods out of them.

Acts 14:14-15b

14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: 15 "Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you.

Barnabas and Paul, clearly alarmed by the men's actions, tore their clothes and rushed into the crowd. There are many examples of renting clothes in the Bible. Most often, it had to do with great grief or blasphemy. The chief priest tore his clothes before Christ, mistakenly accusing him of blasphemy in Matt 26:63-66:

The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

64 "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

65 Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. 66 What do you think?"

"He is worthy of death," they answered.

Older translations used the word *rent* for the word *tore*. Joshua is an illustration of the distress felt by Paul and Barnabas in Josh 7:6 when the Amorites decimated the Israelites:

6 Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the Lord, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads.

Paul and Barnabas responded first by asserting that they were only men. John received a similar rebuke when he tried to worship an angel of God in Rev 22:7-9:

7 "Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book."

8 I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. 9 But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"

Despite this clear teaching, many today of the denominations' clergy consider that they are divine or reverent, and they let others to consider them so, even allowing people to bow and scrape before them. They take to themselves titles like reverend and father. Jesus taught in Matt 23:9-12:

9 And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. 10 Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ. 11 The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

Acts 14:15b-18

We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. 16 In the past, he let all nations go their own way. 17 Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy. 18 Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

Paul and Barnabas did not look the other way, but launched directly into an attack; nor should we today when we face erroneous ideas and false teaching. Their argument was straightforward and almost got them killed: Turn from these worthless things (idols) to the living God. The evidence of God was equally straightforward. He made everything in heaven and earth. *In the past, he let all nations go their own way* is a statement like the one Paul made to the Athenian philosophers in Acts 17:29-31:

29 "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone – an image made by man's design and skill. 30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. 31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."

God has left testimony of himself in the rain and crops, plenty of food to eat, and joy in our hearts. This argument also reappears in Rom 1:20: "20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."

Even with all this, the enamored crowds still wanted to sacrifice to them. However, the climate quickly changes.

Acts 14:19-20

19 *Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. 20 But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.*

All it took to turn this crowd was Jews coming from Antioch and Iconium. The result was that they stoned Paul and left him for dead. But Paul was not dead and the next day, he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

From Derbe, They Return and Appoint Elders in Each Church

Acts 14:21-25

21 *They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, 22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said. 23 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. 24 After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, 25 and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.*

After establishing the church in Derbe, they returned to the cities where they had established other churches—Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. Their goal was to strengthen and encourage the churches. The idea that we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God was first presented by the Lord himself in Luke 16:16: "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it."

To secure the churches, they appointed elders in each church. Elders are called pastors (shepherds) and bishops (overseers), depending on the translation. Paul used the words interchangeably in Acts 20:17, 28-31.

17 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the **elders** of the church.

28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**. Be **shepherds** of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. 29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31 So be on your guard! [Emphasis added].

Peter also used the words in this very same way in 1 Peter 5:1-3

5 To the **elders** among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be **shepherds** of God's flock that is under your care, serving as **overseers** – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. [Emphasis added]

The point is that God's pattern was for elders (plural) to take the oversight in every church, to feed the flock and to protect the flock. Each of these congregations was all sufficient and autonomous. There is no record in the New Testament of a hierarchy beyond the local church. A unique feature of the Lord's church as presented in the New Testament is that there are no regional, national, or worldwide bodies. Any organization larger than the local church is unscriptural.

Returning and Reporting to Antioch

Acts 14-26-28

26 From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. 27 On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. 28 And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

They sailed back to Antioch, the church from which they had been committed to this great work by the grace of God. The entire church heard the news of all God had done and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. They stayed a long time in Antioch.

22. Jerusalem Conference on the Gentiles' Obligation to the Law of Moses: Acts 15

Acts 14 closed with Paul and Barnabas returning to Antioch from their first missionary journey. When they got there, they briefed the church on "all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles." They stayed in Antioch with the disciples for a long time.

Acts 15 opens with a dispute in the church that occurred when men came from Judea and taught that Gentile Christians had to be circumcised to be saved. This dissension and its resolution constitute a shift of epic proportion in how the church treated Gentiles.

A Sharp Dispute on Binding the Law of Moses on the Gentiles

Acts 15:1-4

15 Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. 3 The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad. 4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

The men who came down from Judea (called today Judaizing teachers) were clearly false teachers who made circumcision a matter of law, binding it upon Christians in order for them to be saved. This is the first documented case of Jews attempting to bind elements of the law of Moses on Gentile Christians. This issue was to plague the church of the first century. In fact, Paul will go on to refute these false doctrines in detail in Romans and Galatians, and the writer of Hebrews will refute them in his letter. Many false teachers of the 21st century look to the Old Testament and the law of Moses to support their false doctrines. In this example, in Acts, they were specifically trying to bind circumcision; and not just bind it, but they taught without it "you cannot be saved."

Since we have the scriptures recorded for us, we should be able to see the clear division between the old and new covenants. Paul answered this false teaching in Gal 3:10-14:

10 All who rely on **observing the law** are under a **curse**, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." 11 Clearly **no one is justified** before God **by the law**, because, "The righteous will live by faith." 12 The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them." 13 Christ **redeemed us** from **the curse of the law** by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." 14 He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit [Emphasis added].

In Gal 5:2-4, Paul extended his argument to include circumcision, calling it of no value and saying that it alienates us from Christ:

2 Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be **of no value to you at all**. 3 Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. 4 You who are trying to be justified by law **have been alienated from Christ**; you have fallen away from grace [Emphasis added].

If a person keeps one part of the law, he is obligated to keep the whole law, which is impossible. *Those who keep the law are fallen from grace* speaks to modern practices such as instrumental music, burning incense, church buildings as sanctuaries, plurality of wives, infant baptism as dedication, keeping the Sabbath day, and many, many others.

Paul, Barnabas, and their company of believers came to Jerusalem after reporting to the churches along the way how that the Gentiles had been converted. They met with the church in Jerusalem and apostles and elders, all of whom welcomed them. They reported to them all that God had done through them.

Believers Who Were Pharisees Contend with Barnabas and Paul

Acts 15:5

5 Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses."

The Pharisees were the equivalent to a political party in the theistic Jewish state in the period between the Old and New Testaments:

A Jewish sect of the intertestamental period noted for strict observance of rites and ceremonies of the written law and for insistence on the validity of their own oral traditions concerning the law (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary).

The Pharisees extend the argument from binding circumcision to be saved to binding the requirement to obey the law of Moses. Luke describes these Pharisees as believers, indicating their position in the church with the further commitment to bind the law of Moses in keeping with the beliefs of their party. These party beliefs extended beyond the law of Moses to the traditions handed down from their predecessors. In Acts 23:8, Luke made the distinction between the Sadducees and Pharisees: "The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all."

The Lord reviewed and condemned the practices of the Pharisees, which bind tradition in Matt 23. In Matt 15:1-2; 6-9, Jesus also condemned their binding of the traditions:

15 Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, 2 "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!"

6 he is not to 'honor his father' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. 7 You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:

8 "'These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.

9 They worship me in vain;
their teachings are but rules taught by men."

The Pharisees were trying to bring their practices and beliefs into the church.

The Apostles and Elders Consider the Question

Acts 15:6-11

6 The apostles and elders met to consider this question. 7 After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. 8 God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. 9 He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. 10 Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? 11 No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

As the apostles and elders considered the questions, Peter took the lead reminding them that God had chosen him as the one first to take the gospel to the Gentiles. When Peter took the message of the gospel to them, they believed, and God made no distinction between them (Gentiles) and us (Jews). That he purified their hearts by faith does not mutually exclude the other acts of obedience, for Peter wrote 1 Peter 1:22a: "22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth . . ."

The idea that these Judaizing teachers were putting a yoke on the Gentiles that neither these elders and apostles nor their fathers were able to bear, was first voiced by the Lord in Acts 23. No one could live up to the law free of sin, and they were unable to bear it. The law led to spiritual death and in effect cursed them: "10 All who rely on **observing the law** are under a **curse**, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.'" Gal 3:10.

Peter's strong assertion is that Gentiles are saved just as the Jews are: through the grace of the Lord Jesus.

Paul and Barnabas Report and James Responds

Acts 15:12-15

12 The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. 13 When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me. 14 Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. 15 The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

Paul and Barnabas supported Peter's contention that God approved the Gentiles by his extending to them the Holy Spirit. They did this by telling of the signs and wonders that God had done among the Gentiles. These signs and wonders confirmed the word that they preached. In Acts 14:3, Luke recorded, " 3 So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the **Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace** by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders. [Emphasis added].

However, it was James, the brother of the Lord, who spoke most effectively. He began with what Peter had said about the gospel going to the Gentiles beginning with Cornelius, and then extended that argument through the agreement that the prophets had with it.

Acts 15:16-18

16 "'After this I will return

*and rebuild David's fallen tent.
Its ruins I will rebuild,
and I will restore it,
17 that the remnant of men may seek the Lord,
and all the Gentiles who bear my name,
says the Lord, who does these things'
18 that have been known for ages.*

Peter quotes Amos 9:11-12 in order to assert that the remnant of men may seek the Lord and the Gentiles may bear his name.

Acts 15:19-21

19 "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. 20 Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. 21 For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath."

James then argues that they should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who turn to God. James presents four points, binding upon all men from the earliest days: abstain from food polluted by idols, abstain from sexual immorality, abstain from meat of strangled animals, and abstain from blood.

These and no more were to be required of the Gentiles, according to James.

The Apostles, Elders, and the Whole Church Responds

Acts 15:22-23a

22 Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers. 23 With them they sent the following letter:

The whole church was united in this agreement on the issue of binding the law of Moses on Gentiles. Of the two men chosen to accompany Paul and Barnabas—Judas and Silas—Silas is the better known. He was with Paul on his second missionary journey, and he is among the writers listed with Paul at the beginning of the letters to the Thessalonians. Peter includes him as a helper in 1 Peter 5:12: "12 With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, . . ."

The integrity of their action rests on the unanimity of the apostles, elders, and whole church at Jerusalem, and on the fact that Judas and Silas were leaders among the brothers. These men carry the following letter with them:

Acts 15:23b-29

*The apostles and elders, your brothers,
To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:*

Greetings. 24 We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. 25 So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul – 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. 28 It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the

following requirements: 29 You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.

Farewell.

The letter condemns the acts of the Judaizing teachers, who went out without authorization to trouble and disturb the church. The letter also approves Barnabas and Paul, and authorizes Judas and Silas, who are to confirm by word of mouth what the letter says.

The content of the letter includes the same four basic points made by James, asserting that neither the Holy Spirit nor they want to burden the Gentiles with anything beyond these four requirements:

You are to abstain from food sacrifices to idols. When pagan idolaters ate the food sacrificed to idols, they communed with idols. According to Paul in 1 Cor 10:18-22, this is what made the act of eating this food forbidden:

18 Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? 19 Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? 20 No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. 22 Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

You are to abstain from blood. God asserted the principle of not eating the lifeblood of any creature long before the law of Moses. In that sense, prohibition against eating lifeblood was a law to all people for all time. All people were one before the law of Moses separated the Jews from the nations (Gentiles). In Gen 9:4-6, God spoke:

4 "But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. 5 And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man.

6 "Whoever sheds the blood of man,
by man shall his blood be shed;
for in the image of God
has God made man.

This law, which predated the law of Moses, was reiterated for the Israelites in the law of Moses in Lev 17:11-14

11 For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. 12 Therefore I say to the Israelites, "None of you may eat blood, nor may an alien living among you eat blood."

13 "Any Israelite or any alien living among you who hunts any animal or bird that may be eaten must drain out the blood and cover it with earth, 14 because the life of every creature is its blood. That is why I have said to the Israelites, "You must not eat the blood of any creature, because the life of every creature is its blood; anyone who eats it must be cut off."

Abstain from the meat of strangled animals. The original prohibition in Gen 9:4-6 above also prohibited eating the "meat that has its life blood still in it." In practical application, these

two commands strike at the same sin—eating and/or drinking lifeblood. However, if the word of God had said only one or the other, people would have said that they could do one or the other.

Abstain from sexual immorality. The record of God forbidding adultery and sexual immorality begins with the Israelites and the ten commandments. However, in the days of Abraham the sin was condemned by example, according to Jude 7:

7 In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

In the New Testament, Christ extended the sin of adultery to the thoughts of one's heart in Matt 5:27-28 27 "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Paul gave the sin of sexual immorality a special meaning in 1 Cor 6:18-20:

18 Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. 19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

In Rev 2:20, the Lord connects sexual immorality as a common practice in worshipping idols:

20 Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.

In Num 25:1-3, the word connects the dots between sexual immorality, eating meat sacrifices to idols, and bowing down to worship these false Gods:

25 While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in **sexual immorality** with Moabite women, 2 who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people **ate** and **bowed down** before these gods. 3 So **Israel joined in worshipping** the Baal of Peor. And the Lord's anger burned against them. [Emphasis added.]

Antioch Receives the Letter

Acts 15:30-35

30 The men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. 31 The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. 32 Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers. 33 After spending some time there, they were sent off by the brothers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them. 35 But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.

Just as the entire church in Jerusalem agreed to send the letter, so did the entire church at Antioch receive the letter, being glad for its encouragement. After remaining some time in Antioch, encouraging and strengthening the brothers, Judas and Silas returned to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch teaching and preaching the word of the Lord.

Paul Sets out on His Second Journey

Acts 15:36-41

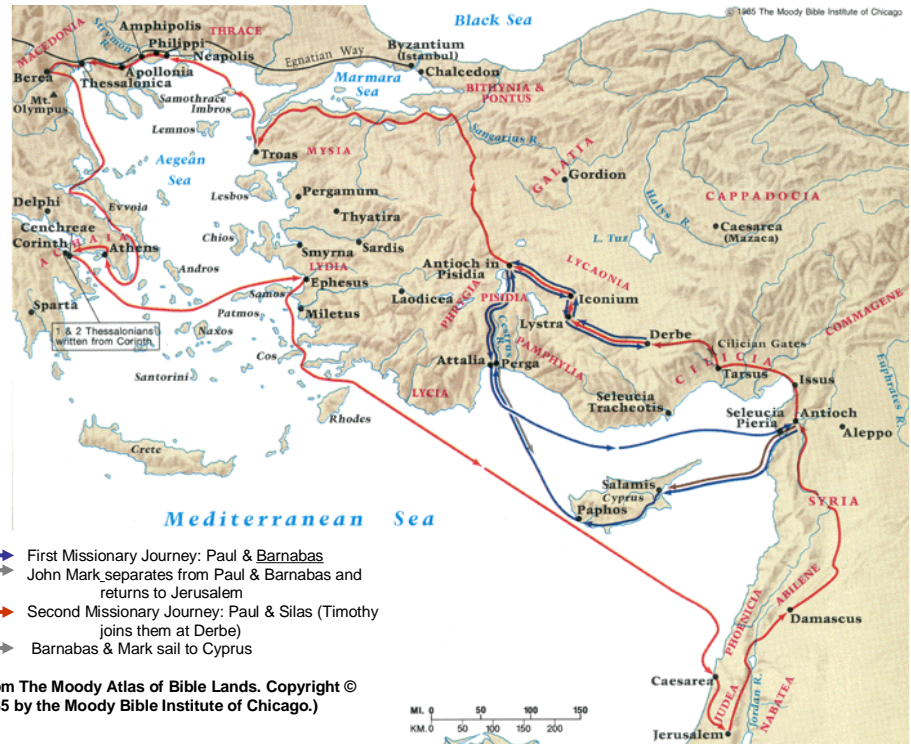
36 Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." 37 Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, 38 but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. 39 They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, 40 but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. 41 He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Paul and Barnabas determined to revisit the churches that they had established during the first missionary journey. However, a dispute over whether to take John Mark arose, since he had deserted them in Pamphylia. [See the detail notes on this dispute in Acts 13:13-14.] The company split in two with Barnabas and Mark sailing for Cyprus; and Paul and Silas, who evidently returned from Jerusalem, (Acts 15:33) strengthened the churches through Syria and Cilicia. Paul was on his way for the second missionary journey. With two teams now working, the dispute, which could have hurt the church, became an asset.

23. The Macedonian Call and Conversions at Philippi: Acts 16

Acts 15 closed with Paul and Barnabas leaving on their second missionary journey, with the intent to revisit the brothers in all the towns where they preached on the first journey. A separation occurred between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark who had turned back on the first journey [See the detailed notes on this dispute in Acts 13:13-14.]. Barnabas and John Mark sailed for Cyprus; and Paul and Silas struck out through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Luke described their contention as a “sharp disagreement”. However, by Corinth, Paul was endorsing Barnabas, expressing knowledge of his work in 1 Cor 9:6: “6 Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living?” Later, in Rome, Paul fully supported John Mark, who was with him there, according to Col 4:10: “10 My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)”



Timothy Joins Paul

Acts 16:1-2

16 He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. 2 The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him.

Derbe and Lystra were the last two churches Paul and Barnabas visited on the first journey. It was from Derbe that they turned around, revisiting the churches that they had established and organizing them with elders in each one. Acts 14:21-24 tells how they had strengthened the churches and appointed elders (plural) in each church:

Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, 22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said. 23 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

A huge event, because of its future benefits to the work of the Lord, was when Paul selected Timothy to accompany him. 1 Cor 4:17 expresses Paul's love and reliance on Timothy: "17 For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church." So close were Paul and Timothy, that Paul called him his *true son* in 1 Tim 1:2: "2 To Timothy my true son in the faith;" and *dear son* in 2 Tim 1:2. All Paul's letters beginning in Colossians recognize Timothy as co-author or at least co-correspondent. These letters were in all probability written from prison in Rome, and the Hebrew letter indicates that Timothy was also a prisoner in Heb 13:23: "23 I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you."

Acts 16:3-5

3 Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. 4 As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. 5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

As a free will matter and not as an obligation of faith, Paul circumcised Timothy, making him more effective in working with Jews. There are times when Paul, by act or teaching, accommodated Jews and Gentiles when no principles of the law of Christ were at risk. Acts 18:18 records that Paul took what may have been a Jewish vow: "Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken." This vow, with its cutting of hair, is most likely the Nazirite vow of Numbers 6:3ff. Paul knew that in Jerusalem his credentials as a practicing Jew would come into question. The end of the vow would be the rite of purification spoken of in Acts 21:20-24

20 When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. 21 They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. 22 What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, 23 so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. 24 Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law.

There are also examples of Paul teaching an accommodation with the Gentiles. Paul stated his position in 1 Cor 9:19-22:

19 Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.

Eating meat sacrificed to Greek idols and sold in the marketplace is an application of this principle of accommodation, when it does not violate Christ's law. Paul wrote in 1 Cor 10:25-26a, 27:

25 Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, 26 for, 'The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. . . .' 27 If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of

conscience.

They traveled from town to town reading the letter from the elders of the church in Jerusalem strengthening the churches.

The Macedonian Call

Acts 16:6-10

6 Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. 7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. 8 So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. 9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

The second journey turned north allowing them to preach in regions of Phrygia and Galatia. The Holy Spirit kept them out of Asia and out of Mysia and Bithynia. This took them on a straight course to Troas on the Aegean Sea. Here, Paul had what commonly is called the Macedonian Call. Paul and his companions responded immediately and left to preach the gospel to those in Macedonia, which was the Roman province north of Greece and Achaia.

Acts 16:11-12

11 From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. 12 From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

Photographs by Lee and David Todd Clockwise: Neapolis and Egnation Way, Philippi, Roman Amphitheater, Philippian Jail

Samothrace was an island in the Aegean Sea on the way to Neapolis. Although Philippi was land locked, it was on the main Roman highway, the Egnatian Way, and close to the seaport of Neapolis.

The Conversion of Lydia

Acts 16:13-14

13 On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. 14 One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.



As Paul's custom was, he and his companions sought out worshippers on the Sabbath. As he spoke to the women, Lydia responded to the gospel preached by Paul: "The Lord opened her heart to respond." Her response raises the question: how does God act on the heart of people. This statement clearly places Lydia in a group that includes Cornelius (See notes on Acts 10). Cornelius was a good man who prayed to God and gave gifts to the poor. Evidently, God took notice as Acts 10:4 states:

4 Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked.

The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God.

In all such recorded cases, God provides a way, but the person has to supply faith and obedience to the gospel. There are no cases of divine intervention providing salvation. The Lord taught in the parable of the sower in Luke 8:15: "15 But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop." Paul speaks of how God may have put concern in the heart of Titus in 2 Cor 8:16: "16 I thank God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you." Paul also prayed for the Ephesians that God would affect their hearts in Eph 1:18: "18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints. "

Acts 16:15

15 When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

Therefore, Lydia's response to Paul's teaching, defined her belief. That response was to obey the message by baptism. Only after her response to the message with baptism, did she say; "If you consider me a believer in the Lord . . ." Those who deny baptism unto the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) must answer the question: If Lydia had not responded to the message with baptism, would Paul have considered her a believer? Or how can one be a believer and not obey the message?

Paul and Silas Severely Flogged and Thrown in Jail

Acts 16:16-18

16 Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. 17 This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." 18 She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

The older translation read "spirit of divination" in describing this girl. According to Vine, this description more aptly connects the girl and her masters to the idolatry of Philippi:

DIVINATION: puthon; pu/qwn,

(Eng., "python"), in Greek mythology was the name of the Pythian serpent or dragon, dwelling in Pytho, at the foot of mount Parnassus, guarding the oracle of Delphi, and slain by Apollo. Thence the name was transferred to Apollo himself. Later the word was applied to diviners or soothsayers, regarded as inspired by Apollo. Since demons are the agents inspiring idolatry, 1 Cor 10:20, the young woman in Acts 16:16 was

possessed by a demon instigating the cult of Apollo, and thus had "a spirit of divination."

(from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.)

As a fortuneteller, the girl was a principal source of money for her owners; but when she kept saying that Paul and his companions were servants of the Most High God who are telling the way of salvation, Paul, being troubled, cast out the spirit from her.

Acts 16:19-20

19 When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. 20 They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar 21 by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice."

Philippi was a Roman city with few Jews or Greeks living there. In such a city, it was easy to make the charge stick that Paul and companions were Jews advocating customs unlawful for Romans.

Acts 16:22-24

22 The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. 23 After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. 24 Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

With the crowd behind them, the magistrates had them severely flogged and thrown into prison. The jailer, who was commanded to guard them carefully, doubly secured them in the inner cell with their feet in stocks. Escape under such circumstance would seem impossible.

Conversion of the Philippian Jailer

Acts 16:25-26

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose.

Beaten and jailed, Paul and Silas responded with the bravery of men dedicated to the Lord, whatever may come. Luke had recorded in his gospel the encouraging words of Christ in Luke 21:36: "36 Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man." Their singing fit the New Testament requirement of speaking not only to one another but to the prisoners who were listening. Paul would command all Christians to sing, establishing vocal music as the authorized music of the church. In Eph 5:19-20, he taught:

19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Also in Col 3:16-17, he wrote:

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

The earthquake, so violent that it shook the foundations of the prison reflects, God's power in response to the prayers of the saints. John spoke of that power in symbolic language in Rev 8:4-5:

4 The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. 5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of **thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.** [Emphasis added.]

By God's power, the doors flew open and the chains released.

Acts 8:27-28

27 The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

Immediately upon waking and seeing the doors open, the jailor sought to kill himself. The penalty in that day for letting one's prisoners escape was the giving of one's own life. Paul stopped him.

Acts 16:29-30

29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

Perhaps, the jailer knew from the circumstances surrounding their imprisonment that Paul and Silas were teaching the way of salvation, or perhaps, the miracles of their release confirmed the word they had taught. Whatever his motivation, the jailor asked the most important question of all for an alien sinner: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" The people on the day of Pentecost asked the same question in Acts 2:37: "37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Paul himself had asked this same question prior to his conversion, recorded in Acts 22:8-10:

8 "Who are you, Lord?" I asked.

"I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 9 My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.

10 "What shall I do, Lord?" I asked.

Acts 16:31-34

31 They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. 33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. 34 The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God – he and his whole family.

Paul now tells the jailer the way of salvation, step by step. As with Lydia, the way of salvation starts with "believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." The answer to the question of what must we do in Acts 2:37 is in Acts 2:38: "38 Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.'" The jailer took them, washed their wounds, and was baptized. The urgency of acting on his belief is expressed in the terms—*at that hour of the night and immediately*. When Paul asked the question of what to do, Ananius expressed the same overwhelming sense of urgency in Acts

22:16; "16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name."

The joy expressed by the jailer was only evident after he had obeyed all of the commands included in the way of salvation.

Paul and Silas Freed from Prison

Acts 16:35-37

35 When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: "Release those men." 36 The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace."

37 But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out."

It is only at the end of the ordeal that Paul tells of their Roman citizenship, insisting that those who beat and jailed them without a trial, come and escort them out personally.

Acts 16:38-40

38 The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. 39 They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. 40 After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left.

This is not the end of Paul's relationship with the church at Philippi. Later when he wrote his letter to them, he thanked them for sending support to him as he left the city. Phil 4:15-19 records:

15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. 17 Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. 18 I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. 19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

24. Paul Goes to Achaia and Preaches to the Areopagus: Acts 17

In the last lesson, Paul and Silas came out of the prison, went to Lydia's house for a while, and then left the city of Philippi. The church at Philippi followed Paul with monetary support according Phil 4:15-16:

15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need.

Acts 17 records Paul's efforts as he spread the gospel from Macedonia into Achaia, beginning in Thessalonica. Achaia was the Roman province including ancient and modern Greece.

Paul in Thessalonica

Acts 17:1-4

1 When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. 2 As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said. 4 Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.

When Paul arrived at Thessalonica, he went to the Jewish synagogue and reasoned with them from the scriptures. He was able to explain and prove that Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. The apostles and evangelists preached this very same gospel of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ from the day of Pentecost onward. The end of the logic is that Jesus is the Christ. Since the Gospel is the power of God (Rom 1:16), it is no wonder that Paul persuaded some of the Jews, God-fearing Greeks, and prominent women.

Acts 17:5-9

5 But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. 6 But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, 7 and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus." 8 When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. 9 Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.

The pattern for Paul's life has become one where he goes into a city preaching the death, burial, and resurrection, and proving that Jesus is Christ. Many people, Jews and Gentiles, respond to the gospel; and suddenly the established religious leaders and secular people that



have a political or monetary interest rise up against the word and Paul. These people at Thessalonica are not different; in fact, they actually form a mob and start a riot. They catch Jason, a local believer, and drag him before the city official. In their eyes, Jason's crime was that he welcomed Paul and Silas into his house.

The three-fold charge against Paul and Silas will be the one that, once planted, becomes the rallying cry that the Romans use against the Christians as the kingdom (the church) spreads throughout the Roman Empire. First, they charge that Paul and Silas cause trouble all over the world. Second, they accuse Paul and Silas of defying Caesar's decrees. Third, they say that Paul and Silas teach that there is another king, one called Jesus. These charges, if proven before a Roman court, are treasonous. Such charges will plague the apostles and Christians wherever they go.

The Bereans Were More Noble Than Those at Thessalonica

Acts 17:10-12

10 As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. 11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. 12 Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

Because of the mob, the brothers sent Paul and Silas to Berea, where, as usual, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Acts 17:11 is one of the most powerful and instructive scriptures ever written:

11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

The eagerness of Christians to examine the scriptures to see if the one speaking is telling the truth is both protective and instructive. The scriptures and not man's word are complete and perfect according to Paul's instruction to Timothy in 2 Tim 3:16-17:

16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Paul also teaches that when we read the scriptures we may understand them in Eph 3:2-5:

2 Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. 4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.

The entire effort of false religions from the second century onward is to remove the right of interpretation of the scriptures from individual Christians and to place that right into the hands of a select hierarchy of ecclesiastics or clergy. From the beginning, it was not so. Peter taught in 2 Peter 1:20-21:

20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

The Lord Jesus taught emphatically in John 10:35: “. . . the Scripture cannot be broken. . .” Our charge today is that we eagerly examine the scriptures daily and to see if what is taught is true. In this way, we will be noble and those early Christians at Thessalonica were noble. The power of the gospel, as preached by Paul and tested and proved by the study of the Bereans, prevailed and many believed.

Acts 17:13-15

13 When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. 14 The brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. 15 The men who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

The Jews who were after Paul in Thessalonica followed Paul to Berea. Then the brothers escorted to Paul to Athens. Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea with instructions to join Paul as soon as possible.

Paul Greatly Distressed by Idolatry in Athens

Acts 17:16-18

16 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. 17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.

By education and inspiration, Paul would find a city *full of idols* distressing. He would have known the dangers of idolatry from his study of the Scriptures where God forbade the worship of idols in Ex 20:4-5:

4 "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God . . ."

He was also carrying the letter from the church of Jerusalem to the Gentiles forbidding idolatry in Acts 15:28-29:

28 It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: 29 You are **to abstain from food sacrificed to idols**, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.

In spite of Athens being a city full of idols, Paul was successful in reasoning in the synagogue and the marketplace.

Acts 17:18

18 A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

The Epicurean and Stoic philosophers disputed with Paul, saying that he seemed to advocate foreign gods because he taught about Jesus and the resurrection. Epicurean and Stoic philosophers represented the main philosophies taught in Athens at this time.

The Epicureans. The Epicureans followed the philosophy of Epicurus who was born on the island of Samos in 341 BC, and who taught first in Asia Minor and afterward in Athens until his death in 270 BC. The philosophy spread widely in Asia Minor. Some notes here are from

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Epicurus taught:

“The aim and end of life for every man is his own happiness, and happiness is primarily defined as pleasure. ‘Wherefore we call pleasure the **Alpha and Omega of a blessed life** [Emphasis added]. Pleasure is our first and kindred good. It is the starting-point of every choice and of every aversion, and to it we come back, inasmuch as we make feeling the rule by which to judge every good thing’” (Epicurus, Letter to Menoeceus from International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Electronic Database Copyright © 1996, 2003 by Biblesoft, Inc.).

Epicurus used the phrases *alpha and omega* and *blessed life* to describe his pleasure-dominated philosophy. These same words become the thesis-setting words of *Revelation* by John. In Rev 1:3, John uses the word *blessed* of those who are very different from Epicurus’ pleasure seekers: “Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.” The comparison in language is so stunningly the same that there can be no coincidence. A similarly stunning comparison occurs in the thesis-setting words of Rev 1:8, which follow immediately: “‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.’” That is to say neither Epicurus nor the central element of the Epicurean philosophy—pleasure—are the alpha and omega. Only the Almighty God and his son Jesus take these words and the preeminence and power that such words convey. Paul’s preaching would be in direct conflict with the Epicurean core teaching.

Blessedness is not in pleasure; it is in the Lord God, the almighty. Then Paul sets the inheritance of the faithful—a resurrection from the dead as Christ was raised-- against the tragic second death of pleasure-seekers of every kind. Modern churches—those that turn the worship service to God, performed as he directs in the scriptures, into a hedonistic self-pleasing and entertaining spectacle of singing, arm-waving, hand-clapping, and dancing—should beware.

The Stoics. The people of Asia Minor knew very well the other philosophy addressed by Paul in Athens. This group, the Stoics, derived their name, *Stoic*, from the Stoa Poikile, the painted porch at Athens, where the founders of the school first lectured. This school of Greek philosophy was founded at Athens circa 294 BC by Zeno (circa 336 BC - 264 BC), a native of Citium, a Greek colony in Cyprus. But the Semitic race predominated in Cyprus, and it has been conjectured that Zeno was of Semitic, rather than of Hellenic origin. This would have given him close ties to the religions of the Samaritans and Hebrews, both of which looked to the almighty God of the five books of Moses. It is from this background that Paul refers to an unknown god in Acts 16:23. Zeno’s Greek critics taunted him with being a Phoenician. It suggests, therefore, that the distinctive moral tone of the Stoic system was Semitic and not Hellenic. The centers, among others, were Tarsus and Sidon. Paul, who was formerly Saul of Tarsus, would have known with certainty the Stoic precepts. In the 2nd century B.C., the doctrine came to Rome where it spread widely among the upper classes of Roman society.

The system acquired its most lasting influence by its adoption as the formative factor in the jurisprudence of imperial Rome and Roman law. As the Roman church assimilated aspects of the Romans and Roman law, the philosophy also contributed to the formation of Roman Catholic doctrine and ethics. The main principles of Stoicism may be summarized in three points: 1. Adherents follow nature. 2. The law of Nature is reason (logos)--the principle of

intelligence in man, and the divine reason imminent in the world. 3. Their metaphysics inclined to be a materialistic pantheism. On the one side, Nature is the organization of material atoms by the operation of its own uniform and necessary laws. On the other side, it is a living, rational being, subduing all its parts to work out a rational purpose inherent in the whole. As such, it may be called Providence or God. [These notes on the Stoics are in part from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright © 1996, 2003 by BibleSoft, Inc.]

Modern religions reflect the influence of Stoicism, when they seek rational answers from within themselves, their councils, clergy, and conventions, denying the infallibility of the inspired word of God as the only rule of faith and practice. Again, the apostle Paul summarized the case against these reason-dominated philosophies in Col 2:8: "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ."

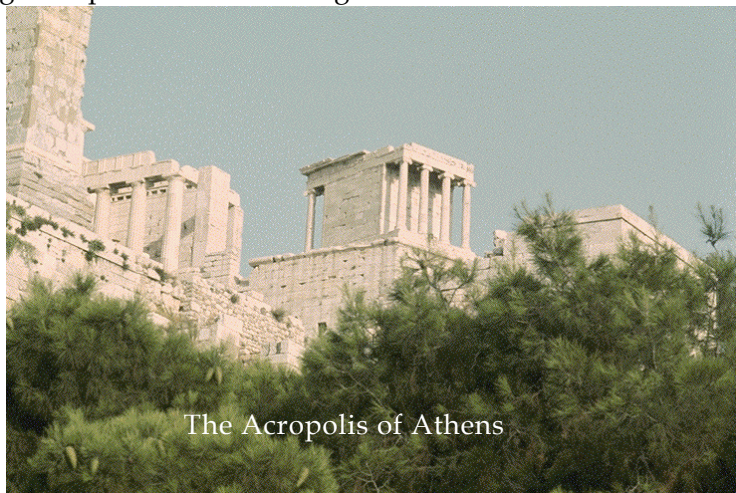
Acts 17:19-21

19 Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? 20 You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean." 21 (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

The Areopagus was as much a meeting as a place. The meeting was of those in Athens who met to discuss new and strange ideas that might affect their systems of philosophies. The place was a part of the Acropolis, which was the upper fortified most of Athens:

AREOPAGUS (ar-e-op'-a-gus)
(Areios pagos; Acts 17:19, 22. Mars' Hill, 17:22 the King James Version): A sort of spur jutting out from the western end of the Acropolis and separated from it by a very short saddle. Traces of old steps cut in the rock are still to be seen.

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Paul Preaches to the Meeting of the Areopagus

Acts 17:22-23

22 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

Paul seized on the inscription: "To an Unknown God" as a beginning place to proclaim the true God and the savior Jesus Christ. The notes above on the Stoics indicate that there was in their history and background an awareness of a God who is above all and over all.

Acts 17:24-28

24 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. 25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. 26 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. 27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 28 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

Paul begins with a simple but profound statement of who God is. God made everything; he does not live in temples made with hands; he is not served with human hands; he gives life, breath, and everything; he made man and determines where he shall live. He did all this so men would seek and reach out for him. Paul uses the poet's line to connect them to the conclusions one must draw if, indeed, everything is from God, even life and breath, and we are his offspring.

Acts 17:29-31

29 "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone – an image made by man's design and skill. 30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. 31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."

Why would God's offspring ever think that God—the divine being—be an image of man's design and skill. Rom 1:18-25 elaborates on how foolish it is to think that the all-powerful God came from the imagination of man whom he created:

18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

24 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. 25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen.

This all-powerful God now commands all people everywhere to repent. He will judge the world by Christ, and he proved this by raising Christ from the dead. Paul would later write in 2 Cor 5:10, "10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad."

Acts 17:32-34

32 When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We

want to hear you again on this subject." 33 At that, Paul left the Council. 34 A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

The Athenians had a divided response: some sneered and some wanted to hear more. A few men believed in Athens, not the many in Berea. Apparently, only one of the Areopagus believed. Once Paul leaves for Corinth in Acts 18:1, he will not refer to Athens except to tell how he first came there alone from Thessalonica in 1 Thess 3:1. Other New Testament writers do not refer to Athens.

25. Paul Stays at Corinth and Finishes His 2nd Journey: Acts 18

The close of Acts 17 found Paul leaving a few disciples at Athens. Acts 18 will open with him arriving at Corinth. Corinth was the seat of Roman government in Achaia, and therefore, a hodge-podge of humanity as the Roman traffic from the East and West combined to pass through. Three good harbors in Corinth connected the eastern and western seas. The Corinth that Paul found was a metropolis nurtured by the wealth of the Caesars. This wealth and commerce were an attraction to the many Jews who settled there. The principal idols were Aphrodite goddess of love and beauty and Athena goddess of wisdom, both of which came from early Phoenician settlers. They reflected the eastern religions, perhaps those even back to Baal, from which western idolatry emanated. The importance of these idols in the Corinthian culture explains, in part, the trouble Paul had in the church at Corinth.



Greece: Corinth, Corinthian columns

Corinthian columns at Corinth in south-central Greece. The remains of the ancient city lie about 50 miles west of Athens, at the eastern end of the Gulf of Corinth.(from Bible Photos of the Holy Land, Photo Copyright © 1993, 1994 Corel Corporation.)

1 Cor 3:5-6 shows Apollos as a co-worker with Paul in Corinth:

5 What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe - as the Lord has assigned to each his task. 6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.

Paul Preaches to the Jews

Acts 18:1-4

18 After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. 2 There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, 3 and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. 4 Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

After Paul arrived in Corinth, he met Aquila and Priscilla who had recently come from Rome where they were under an order to leave given to all Jews from Claudius, the emperor. Since he was a tentmaker, Paul stayed and worked with them. Paul said in 1 Cor 4:12, "12 We work hard with our own hands." Priscilla and Aquila were not only hard workers with their hands but they were hard workers in the church according to 1 Cor 16:19:

19 The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house.

Later, Paul paid them a special note of praise for their work in Rom 16:3-5:

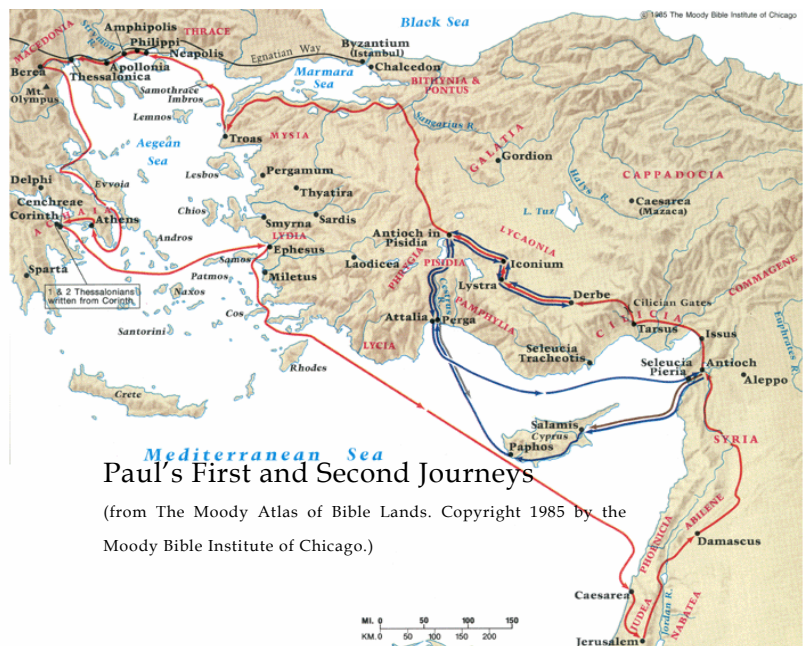
3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. 4 They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. 5 Greet also the church that meets at their house.

As usual, Paul started his preaching in the synagogue Acts 18:5-6

5 When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. 6 But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul was able to give up tent making and preach full time, as it were. Perhaps, this would be the time that he took wages from other churches as accounted in 2 Cor 11:7-9:

7 Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge? 8 I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you.



The figure of *speech--he shook*

out his clothes - to protest the abuse of the Jews is the same as the figure - *shaking the dust off ones feet*. Luke uses the alternate expression in Acts 13:51-52: "51 So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." In giving the limited commission to his disciples, the Lord had instructed the disciples on what to do when anyone refused to listen in Matt 10:14: "14 If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town."

Paul uses another figure here that is to occur later in his ministry: "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility." When he talked to the elders at Ephesus, he said in Acts 20:26-27: "26 Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God."

Today, we, as Paul, are sowers of the seed, and God gives the increase. At some point, we must leave those who have heard and have rejected the word, and spend our time sowing where the harvest is more promising. We must, as Paul, shake out our garments, understand that we are free from the blood of men who refuse the word of God, and turn to those who have not heard.

Acts 18:7-8

7 Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. 8 Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.

In spite of the ill treatment by the Jews, many Jews and Gentiles alike turned to the gospel, believed, and were baptized. Thus, Paul had planted the church in Corinth.

The Jews Unite against Paul and Bring Him into Court

Acts 18:9-13

9 One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: It Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. 10 For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city. 11 So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

12 While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him into court. 13 "This man," they charged, "is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law."

The Lord, appearing to Paul, told him that he would protect him and that he should keep speaking. Paul did as the Lord told him and stayed in Corinth for 18 months, teaching the word of God. After this time, the Jews brought a united attack against Paul. Their charge was directed at Paul's teaching on the worship of the church as contrary to the law. The charge was specifically Jewish in its content and not a charge of violating Roman law.

Acts 18:14-17

14 Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to the Jews, "If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you. 15 But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law - settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things." 16 So he had them ejected from the court. 17 Then they all turned on Sosthenes the synagogue ruler and beat him in front of the court. But Gallio showed no concern whatever.

Because the charge was specifically Jewish, Gallio dismissed it, telling them to settle it themselves. Gallio literally threw them out of court. Once outside the court, they beat Sosthenes the ruler of the synagogue - certainly because of his sympathy for Paul and the Way. In 1 Cor 1:1, Paul speaks of Sosthenes as a brother, and as one who is apparently accompanying Paul after he left Corinth: "1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes."

Paul Sails for Syria

Acts 18:18-22

18 Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken. 19 They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. 20 When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. 21 But as he left, he promised, "I will come back if it is God's will." Then he set sail from

Ephesus. 22 When he landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch.

Paul left Corinth, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila, sailing for Syria and the end of his second missionary journey. Paul cut off his hair at Cenchrea, a place just to the west of

Corinth, because-of a vow. This vow, with its cutting of hair, is most likely the Nazirite Vow of Numbers 6:3 and discussed in these notes on Acts 16 where Paul had Timothy circumcised in order to be of no offense to the Jews. In this case, the vow was, perhaps in preparation for his return to Jerusalem at the conclusion of his second journey. However, Luke does not record any such visit at this time. At the end of his third journey, James and the elders of the church in Jerusalem charge Paul to go through the rites of purification in order to satisfy the requirements of the Jewish Christians. Acts 21:20-24 reads:

Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. 21 They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. 22 What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, 23 so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. 24 Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law.

Paul was always willing to accommodate Jew and Gentile alike for the furtherance of the gospel. He summarized his case in 1 Cor 9:19-21:

19 Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.

He leaves Priscilla and Aquila at Ephesus and completes his second journey, returning to Antioch via Caesarea.

Paul's Third Missionary Journey

Acts 18:23

23 After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

Paul finished his second journey back in Antioch. After some time, he went back through the regions of his first and second journeys. In this third journey, Paul proceeds into Asia and visits cities in Phrygia, Lydia, and Mysia-places forbidden when he received the Macedonian call during the second journey. His effort in all these places was to strengthen the disciples.



Conversion of Apollos Acts

18:24-26

24 Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. 25 He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he

spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. 26 He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

Paul had left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus where Apollos was coming also. That Apollos was a Jew with a Greek name and that he was a native of Alexandria indicate that he was a Grecian Jew. Alexandria was an island city in the Nile delta created to honor Alexander the Great. As an international city, Alexandria was divided by areas dedicated to each of its nationalities. Thus, the Jews occupied a region of the city for centuries before Christ. Its main contribution to Christianity was its manuscript of the Old Testament:

3. Alexandria's Influence on the Bible: (1) In Dan 11 the Ptolomies of Alexandria and their wives are made a theme of prophecy. Apollos, the "orator," was born in Alexandria (Acts 18:24). Luke twice speaks of himself and Paul sailing in "a ship of . Alexandria" (Acts 27:6; 28:11). Stephen 'disputed' in Jerusalem in the synagogue of the Alexandrians (Acts 6:9). These direct references are few, but the influence of Alexandria on the Bible was inestimable.

(2) The Septuagint, translated in Alexandria (3rd to 2nd centuries B.C.), preserves a Hebrew text 1,000 years older than any now known. This translation, if not used by Jesus, was certainly used by Paul and other New Testament writers, as shown by their quotations ... This Greek Bible not only opened for the first time the "Divine Oracles" to the Gentiles and thus gave to the Old Testament an international influence, but it affected most vitally the Hebrew and Christian development.

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In this context, it is easy to see how Apollos was so learned in the scriptures. A fervent speaker, he had been taught the way of the Lord accurately, but he only knew the baptism of John. Priscilla and Aquila who heard him speak, took him aside, and explained to him more adequately the way of the Lord. The baptism of John could not provide Apollos with the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Rom 6:3-5), only the baptism of Christ. See the notes on Acts 19 where Paul also confronts those who know only the baptism of John. The examples of Apollos and the men of Ephesus in the next chapter teach that the form of baptism to which one submits is essential to the forgiveness of sins and, therefore, necessary to salvation.

Acts 18:27-28

27 When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. 28 For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

At this point Apo~ leaves for Achaia the province of Corinth. Paul refers to their common efforts in 1 Cor 3:5-6, where Apollos watered the work that Paul had planted:

5 What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe - as the Lord has assigned to each his task. 6 I planted the seed, Apollos

watered it, but God made it grow.

In 1 Cor 4:6, Paul refers to Apollos:

6 Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not (go beyond what is written." Then you will not take pride in one man over against another.

Because Apollos was Grecian and powerful in the scriptures, some think he wrote *Hebrews*.

26. Paul Arrives at Ephesus on His 3rd Journey: Acts 19

Acts 18:23 tells how Paul finished his second missionary journey back in Antioch:

23 After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

After some time, he went back through the regions of his first and second journeys. In this third journey, Paul proceeded into Asia and visited cities in Phrygia, Lydia, and Mysia—places forbidden when he received the Macedonian call during the second journey. His purpose and effort in all these places was to strengthen the disciples.

Paul Arrives at Ephesus to Find Those Who Only Knew the Baptism of John

Acts 19:1-3

19 While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples 2 and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

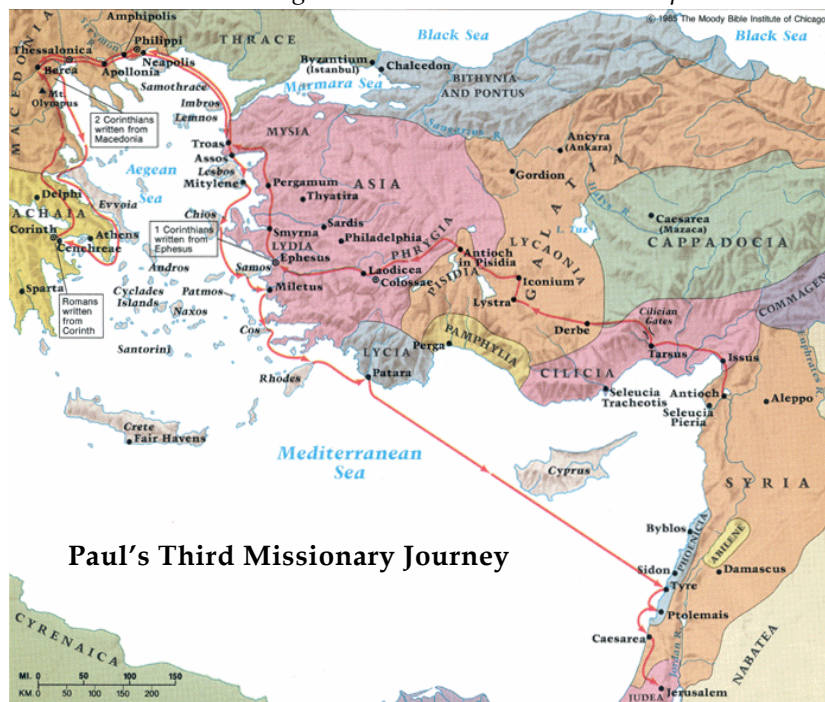
3 So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"

"John's baptism," they replied.

After Apollos had left Ephesus for Corinth, Paul arrived in Ephesus where he found believers, who like Apollos before his conversion, knew only the baptism of John. Paul's first question addressed whether or not they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed. This measure of the Holy Spirit would be that measure promised to all believers upon their obedience to the gospel (See notes on Acts 2:38). In Eph 1:13-14, Paul stated exactly what he meant:

13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession — to the praise of his glory.

Of course, having received John's baptism, they would not have received the forgiveness of sins or the Holy Spirit. They are a comparable example to Apollos who had to correctly obey the word of Christ and be baptized by the baptism of Christ in Acts 18:24-26. Apollos and these Ephesians illustrate that there is only one baptism according to the gospel of Christ as



Paul's Third Missionary Journey

Eph 4:4-6 teaches:

4 There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— 5 one Lord, one faith, **one baptism**; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. [Emphasis added.]

The Difference between the Baptism of John and the Baptism of Christ

Acts 19:4-7

4 Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." 5 On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. 7 There were about twelve men in all.

John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, looking forward to the coming Christ upon whom they were to believe. They, like Apollos, understood that they must be baptized into the name of Jesus, and they immediately did so. Not only does the *one baptism* of Eph 4 stand, but also the *one Lord* and *one faith* of Eph 4 stands. Peter had taught in Acts 4:12: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." These Ephesians, as Apollos before them, understood that they were lost since they had not been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. All people must be baptized into the name of the Lord to be saved—today as well as in the day of Apollos and the Ephesians.

The measure of the Holy Spirit, which came upon them at the laying on of the apostle Paul's hands, endowed them to perform the various miracles given to protect the early church. [See the discussion of this measure in the notes on Acts 8.]

Paul Argues Persuasively about the Kingdom of God

Acts 19:8

8 Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God.

Luke records one of the most intriguing descriptions of Paul's preaching in this passage: Paul argued persuasively about the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God taught by Paul is not the kingdom as described by modern millennial theories and popularized by the various renditions of modern fiction on the second coming. False ideas and false doctrines concerning the kingdom of God are too numerous to deal with here. However, the scriptures teach explicitly and specially about the true kingdom of God, much of which comes from Paul's own pen.

The Lord had taught that the called out body (the church) of believers would constitute a kingdom against which the gates of Hades could not prevail in Matt 16:17-19:

17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

He also taught that this kingdom was coming in the time of those then living and not in some future millennium in Matt 16:28: "28 I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." He added in Mark 9:1 that it would come with power: "9 And he said to them, 'I tell you the truth, some who are

standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.'" He also taught that he would take the Lord's Supper with us in his Father's kingdom in Matt 26:26-29:

26 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

27 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."

That power and that supper came on the day of Pentecost after the Lord's death as, indeed, the Lord himself had forecast in Acts 1:8: "8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Also, on that day of Pentecost, came the *one baptism* spoken of by Paul and foretold by the Lord as necessary to ones entering the kingdom of God in John 3:5-6, "5 Jesus answered, 'I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.'"

What Paul preached about the kingdom of God must have agreed with Philip's preaching in Acts 8:12: "12 But when they believed Philip as he preached **the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ**, they were baptized, both men and women." [Emphasis added.] Repeatedly, Paul preached this kingdom of God. In Acts 20:25, he said: "25 Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again." In fact, Luke concludes his account of Acts with the same statement on Paul's preaching in Acts 28:31: "31 Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ."

The kingdom, which was to come, came in Acts 2; and the citizens of that kingdom are the called out body of believers. Paul identified those citizens in Eph 2:19-22:

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Christians today must accept the teaching of 1 Cor 4:6: "Do not go beyond what is written." They must not accept the latter day revelations and fictional stories that call for a kingdom yet to come. To do so is to go completely beyond what the apostles and prophets wrote in the New Testament. There is no similarity or compatibility between the New Testament teachings on the kingdom of God and the concepts of modern millennial theories and fiction.

After Acts 2, when the kingdom of God came with power, the apostles and prophets always speak of the kingdom in the present tense. It is never spoken of in future tense as something yet to come. In 1 Cor 15:23-25, Paul clearly shows the kingdom is under Christ's reign as king: "24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power." In Col 1:12-13, Paul's shows that we now share in the inheritance in the kingdom and that God has brought us into the kingdom:

12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified **[past tense]** you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued **[past tense]** us

from the dominion of darkness and brought **[past tense]** us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. [Emphasis and comments added.]

The Hebrew writer points out emphatically that the called out are entering the kingdom now and not at some future time foretold only by false teachers and the writers of pop fiction.

In Heb 12:28-29, he writes:

28 Therefore, since we are receiving **[present tense]** a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be **[present tense]** thankful, and so worship **[present tense]** God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our "God is a consuming fire." [Emphasis and comments added.]

John begins the *Revelation of Jesus Christ* by asserting the present existence of the kingdom and the place of Christians, to whom he is writing, in that kingdom. He wrote in Rev 1:6: "6 and has made **[past tense]** us to be a kingdom and priests to serve **[present tense]** his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. [Emphasis and comments added.]" In addition, John made it clear in Rev 1:9 that he was, with us, in the kingdom:

9 I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

In Rev 5, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders responded to the prayers of the saints with a new song. In that song in Rev 5:10, they sang:

10 You have made them **[the saints]** to be **[present tense]** a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." [Emphasis and comments added.]

This kingdom of God is now on earth and in heaven forever; and it includes all the saints whom God adds to the church. This teaching continues through the *Revelation*. In Rev 12:10 also speaks of the kingdom in existence during the lives of the saints:

10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:
"Now have come the **salvation** and the **power**
and the **kingdom** of our God,
and the **authority** of his Christ. [Emphasis and comments added.]

The salvation, power, kingdom, and authority exist during the lives of the saints and not at that future, fictitious time of the false teachers. When did salvation exist? It existed on the day of Pentecost where in Acts 2:47 Luke recorded: "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." When did Christ receive authority? He said that he had all authority in Matt 28:18: "18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." When did the power come? Jesus said that it would come with the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem in Acts 1:8: "8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Luke recorded the exact time that power came in Acts 2:4: "4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." When did the kingdom of God come? Peter records the exact time that the risen Savior sat upon his throne in Acts 2:32-36

32 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. 33 Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and

has poured out what you now see and hear. 34 For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,

"The Lord said to my Lord:

"Sit at my right hand

35 until I make your enemies

a footstool for your feet." ' 1

36 "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

Faithful Christians must hold fast to the teaching and not go beyond what is written about the kingdom of God.

Acts 19:9-10

9 But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. 10 This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

Even with the power of the Holy Spirit and his persuasive arguments, Paul was unable to convince many of those who heard him at the synagogue. Their attitudes and responses were similar to what we face today: some were obstinate, refused to believe, and publicly spoke evilly against the way. Paul moved with his disciples to the hall of Tyrannus. During the course of his two years, all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord.

The Effect of God's Extraordinary Miracles

Acts 19:11-12

11 God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.

As Paul argued persuasively concerning the kingdom of God, God did extraordinary miracles through him. As in the previous lessons, these miracles were to confirm the word, as in Mark 16:20: "20 Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it." Heb 2:3-4 places that confirmation in the past tense:

This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. 4 God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

With the advent of the written word, these signs and miracles passed away, according to 1 Cor 13:8: "But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away." These Ephesians, as those described at the beginning of the chapter, had to believe the word, repent of their sins, and be baptized in the name of Christ.

The Manifestation of Evil in Ephesus and the New Testament World

Acts 19:13-16

13 Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over

those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." 14 Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. 15 [One day] the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" 16 Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

In New Testament times, evil spirits and demons possessed people. However, as one reads the New Testament, it is apparent that they were being diminished in power and influence by the power of Christ and the Holy Spirit. In Luke 4:33-37, the words *demons* and *evil spirits* are used synonymously, and Jesus has absolute power over them:

33 In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an evil spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, 34 "Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God!"

35 "Be quiet!" Jesus said sternly. "Come out of him!" Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him.

36 All the people were amazed and said to each other, "What is this teaching? With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!" 37 And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area.

The demons knew Jesus as Lord just as they knew Paul as the Lord's apostle here. In fact, the demons fear and tremble before the Lord, according to James 2:19: "19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder." From the very beginning, the Lord had foretold that some would claim his power to cast out demon as they are doing here in Ephesus. In Matt 7:22-23, the Lord had said:

22 Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and **in your name drive out demons** and perform many miracles?" 23 Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" [Emphasis added.]

Then Jesus described and defined the war that he fights against Satan and his evil spirits in Matt 12:26-29 when he is accused of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of evil:

26 If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? 27 And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. 28 But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

29 "Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house.

Jesus drove out demons by the Spirit of God, and parallel happening with that ability is the kingdom of God coming upon them. The rise of the kingdom of God spelled the downfall of the kingdom of Satan. The Lord entered the strong man's house and bound him, and controlled his house. However, there remained in the New Testament world the influence of evil spirits—sometimes in people, like here in Ephesus, but always in idolatry and false religions. Paul explained the dichotomy in 1 Cor 10:20-22, making clear who holds the power and strength:

20 No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. 22 Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

These demons are capable of performing miraculous signs to deceive the world, according to Rev 16:14: "They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty." These evil spirits dwell in people today – who refuse to love the truth and be saved – through lust and sin and lying wonders. 2 Thess 2:9-10 is emphatic and clear:

9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

God relegated evil spirits to what Christ call the arids places, according to Luke 11:24-26

24 "When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' 25 When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. 26 Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first."

Of course, a man so freed from evil, who succumbs to multiplied forces of evil, achieves a state worse than the first. Peter wrote in 2 Peter 2:20-22:

20 If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. 21 It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. 22 Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud."

In Rev 18:1-2, evil spirits occupy the fallen Babylon:

8 After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. 2 With a mighty voice he shouted:

"Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!

She has become a home for demons
and a haunt for every evil spirit,

a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird.

God through Christ bound the devil, the evil spirits, and the spiritual hosts of wickedness with his inspired word of the Holy Spirit. Paul writes in Eph 6:10-17:

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the **devil's schemes**. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, **against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms**. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the **belt of truth** buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of **righteousness** in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the **gospel of peace**. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of **faith**, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the

helmet of salvation and the **sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.** [Emphasis added.]

The Result of These Powerful Miracles

Acts 19:17-20

17 When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. 18 Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. 19 A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. 20 In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

Confronted with these powerful miracles, Jews and Greeks of Ephesus were afraid and honored the name of the Lord Jesus. Like those on the day of Pentecost, one might say, they were cut to their hearts. Common to all those who obey the gospel message, they believed as required by Heb 11:6: "6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." They also confessed their evil deeds as in Rom 10:10: "10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." They showed their repentance by burning their scrolls fulfilling God's command in Acts 17:30-31: "30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. 31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed." As those in the first of the chapter, they certainly were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. The word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

A Great Disturbance about the Way

Acts 19:21-22

21 After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. "After I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome also." 22 He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer.

This passage begins the final leg of Paul's third journey as he turns to Jerusalem once more. 1 Cor 16:5-9 shows the projected itinerary with Paul passing through Macedonia, perhaps to raise support for the saints in Jerusalem

5 After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you – for I will be going through Macedonia. . . . 8 But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, 9 because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me.

Romans 15:25-26, which most think he penned from Ephesus at about this time (58 AD), makes clear that Paul planned to raise support for the poor and also to carry it to them in Jerusalem.

25 Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.

Acts 19:23-27

23 About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. 24 A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen. 25 He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said: "Men, you know we receive a good income from this business. 26 And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray

large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all. 27 There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty."

Demetrius created a great disturbance about the Way because he was afraid of losing income from his craft of making idols. From his idolatrous point of view, Demetrius thought he and his fellow tradesmen would lose money; and Artemis, goddess of the earth, would be discredited and robbed of her divine majesty. Artemis, as with all idols, had her origin in the East, as far as Mesopotamia, Babylon, and Assyria, emanating and spreading from the influence and popularity of Baal. She was known, as Demetrius said, throughout Asia and the world. That she could be robbed of her divine majesty proves that she had no divinity to begin with, being a piece of metal or stone.

Acts 19:28-31

28 When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" 29 Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and rushed as one man into the theater. 30 Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. 31 Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater.

During the chaotic meeting, Paul wanted to appear, but the disciples restrained him. Even some of the public officials – Paul’s friends – tried to constrain him.

Acts 19:32-41

32 The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. 33 The Jews pushed Alexander to the front, and some of the crowd shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. 34 But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

35 The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: "Men of Ephesus, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? 36 Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to be quiet and not do anything rash. 37 You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. 38 If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. 39 If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. 40 As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of today's events. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it." 41 After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

The city clerk gets control of the crowd, and dismisses the assembly. The clerk challenged the crowd by saying that the disciples had not robbed temples or blasphemed their goddess. These facts speak to the care with which Paul and the disciples lived in a world alien to the gospel of Christ, living peacefully and avoiding controversy where possible. 1 Cor 9:21 explains how he lived before Gentiles: “21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.” How do Christians of all times survive the trial of living in their contemporary societies? A quiet and godly life pays huge dividends according to Rom 13:3-5:

Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. 4 For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be

afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.

At the beginning of Acts 20, Paul leaves Ephesus and sets out to Macedonia.

27. Paul leaves Macedonia and Stops in Ephesus: Acts 20

Acts 19:21-22

21 After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. "After I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome also." 22 He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer.

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25 Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.

After making plans, Paul sent his companions on to Macedonia, while he stayed in Ephesus.

Paul Leaves Ephesus for Macedonia

Acts 20:1-6

20 When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said good-by and set out for Macedonia. 2 He traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece, 3 where he stayed three months. Because the Jews made a plot against him just as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia. 4 He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy also, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia. 5 These men went on ahead and waited for us at Troas. 6 But we sailed from Philippi after the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and five days later joined the others at Troas, where we stayed seven days.



The uproar spoken of here is the one of the previous chapter. Demetrius and the silversmiths

had created chaos, which was only silenced by a reasonable plea from the town clerk that they were out of order. Paul traveled back to Macedonia, going through various places in Greece, where he stayed three months, having heard that the Jews had a plot against him. He determined to go back through Macedonia, instead of going to Syria. His companions sailed from Philippi to Troas, where they were joined five days later and where they stayed seven days.

Meeting on the First Day of the Week to Break Bread

Acts 20:7-12

7 On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. 8 There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. 9 Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead. 10 Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "He's alive!" 11 Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left. 12 The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted.

The disciples met on the first day of the week to break bread. The use of the infinitive *to break bread* signifies a common practice—the very purpose for their coming together. If they met, according to purpose, on the first day of the week, one must necessarily infer that they met on every first day of the week. This conclusion runs counter to the contemporary practice of meeting at times other than on the first day of the week; for example, on Thursday evening, monthly, or on a holiday such as Easter. Other passages support the contention that the early churches met every first day of the week.

When the Lord instituted of the Lord's supper, he taught that he would participate with the disciples in the Lord's supper in the father's kingdom. In Matt 26:28-29, he said:

28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.

Immediately after the kingdom had come, the disciples of the early church continuously participated in the Lord's supper. Acts 2:42-43 teaches: "42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." In 1 Cor 11:18-21, Paul teaches that the very purpose of their coming together to take the Lord's supper:

18 In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. 19 No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. 20 When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, 21 for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else.

1 Cor 16:1-3 teaches clearly that the coming together was on the first day of every week:

16 Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. 2 On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.

From these Scriptures, one must conclude that true Christians meet every first day of the week and have communion with the Lord through his supper. At this same time, they gave as they

prospered.

Paul Leaves Troas and Arrives in Miletus

Acts 20:13-16

13 We went on ahead to the ship and sailed for Assos, where we were going to take Paul aboard. He had made this arrangement because he was going there on foot. 14 When he met us at Assos, we took him aboard and went on to Mitylene. 15 The next day we set sail from there and arrived off Kios. The day after that we crossed over to Samos, and on the following day arrived at Miletus. 16 Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in the province of Asia, for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost.

Paul's companions met him at Assos and took him aboard. From there, they sailed down the west coast of Asia past Mitylene, Kios, Samos to Ephesus. Paul clearly was in a hurry to go on to Jerusalem, reaching there by the day of Pentecost.

Paul Addresses the Elders from Ephesus

Acts 20:17-21

17 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. 18 When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. 19 I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. 20 You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. 21 I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

However, Paul did want to talk to the elders of the church at Ephesus. He began his speech by telling them how that they were well aware of his work. They would remember how he had served the Lord with humility and tears. All of this was true even though the Jews plotted against him. All Paul's teaching was public and house to house, and in that teaching he declared that both Jews and Greeks must turn to God in repentance and have faith in the Lord Jesus. This was the same message preached on the day of Pentecost, and in the third chapter of Acts, and in the eighth chapter, and so on throughout Luke's book. This gospel message has not changed throughout Acts, nor has it changed in the centuries since.

Paul Warned by the Spirit of Hardships and Prison

Acts 20:22-24

22 "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. 23 I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. 24 However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

As Paul came to the central part of his message, he reminded them that he was going to Jerusalem not knowing fully what was going to happen to him. The Holy Spirit had warned him repeatedly that he would face prison and hardships. As always in the life of Paul, he considered his life nothing. He wanted only to finish the work that the Lord had set out for him – testifying to the gospel of God's grace. Paul voiced the courage with which he met these challenges to the Philippians in Phil 1:20-21: "20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death." It was later in life and to Timothy, when Paul could

7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Keep Watch over the Flock

Acts 20:25-29

25 "Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. 26 Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. 28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

In this part of his speech, Paul said that none of the elders would see him again. That he was completely innocent of the blood of all men, because he had not hesitated to proclaim the whole will of God, should be an object lesson for all Christians.

Elders, Overseers, and Shepherds All Refer to the Same Office in the Local Church

In the next several verses, he addresses the elders using three different terms: *elders*, *overseers*, and *shepherds*. These three terms have become obscure in their meaning in our time. For example, many people use the word *bishop* or *overseer* to refer to a cleric, who oversees several congregations. Others use the word *pastor* in the place of *shepherd* to refer to the evangelist or preacher working with a congregation. In fact, in the scripture these terms refer to the same elders that Paul called. They are, in fact, synonyms—each represent the same nominal designation, but with a different characteristic. This becomes clear when one views the words in context. Paul first calls them *elders*: "17 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the **elders** of the church." Next, he used overseer and shepherd interchangeably: "28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**. Be **shepherds** of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. [Emphasis added.]

Peter uses these three words in this same powerful and undeniable way in 1 Peter 5:1-4:

5 To the **elders** among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be **shepherds** of God's flock that is under your care, serving as **overseers** — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. [Emphasis added]

According to the *Webster Online Dictionary*, modern terminology uses the word *pastor* without scriptural support to mean a clergyman serving a local church or parish. The New Testament uses the word many times but translates it pastor (s) only one time in Eph 4:11. In modern denominations, the word indicates a single person in a congregation serving as overseer and preacher. Modern denominations also pervert the word *bishop* which modern translations appropriately render *overseer*. The literal translation of the word used for bishop in the older translation is overseer. W. E. Vine explains:

BISHOP (OVERSEER) 1. episkopos (e)pi/skopos), lit., an overseer" (epi, "over," skopeo, "to look or watch"), [the English] "bishop". . . has precisely the same meaning, . . . found in Acts 20:28; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 2:25.

Vine also explains the interplay among the words *elder*, *shepherd (pastor)*, and *overseer (bishop)*:

Note: Presbuteros, "an elder," is another term for the same person as bishop or overseer. See Acts 20:17 with verse 28. The term "elder" indicates the mature spiritual experience and understanding of those so described; the term "bishop," or "overseer," indicates the character of the work undertaken.

Vine also aptly explains that the divine will calls for a plurality of men to hold this office in the local churches:

According to the divine will and appointment, as in the NT, there were to be "bishops" in every local church, Acts 14:23; 20:17; Phil 1:1; Titus 1:5; James 5:14. Where the singular is used, the passage is describing what a "bishop" should be, 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:7. Christ Himself is spoken of as "the... Bishop of our souls," 1 Peter 2:25.

[All references to Vine come from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.]

According to Webster Online Dictionary, modern denominationalism has lost the meaning of bishops as overseers of local congregations:

1. one having spiritual or ecclesiastical supervision: as a : an Anglican, Eastern Orthodox, or Roman Catholic clergyman ranking above a priest, having authority to ordain and confirm, and typically governing a diocese b : any of various Protestant clerical officials who superintend other clergy c : a Mormon high priest presiding over a ward or over all other bishops and over the Aaronic priesthood

Peter confirms the teaching that the words *elder*, *shepherd (pastor)*, and *overseer (bishop)* refer to the same office in the local church where those so selected are always more than one (plural) in 1 Peter 5:1-4

5 To the **elders** among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, . . . 2 Be **shepherds** of God's flock that is under your care, serving as **overseers** — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. [Emphasis added]

Paul is specific in telling the Ephesian elders what they must do to protect the church from the impending apostasy. They are to be *shepherds of the church of God*; and they are to *keep watch over yourselves and all the flock*. Paul tells Titus how elders are to protect the church in Titus 1:9: "9 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it."

Warning of an Impending Apostasy

Acts 20:29-31

29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31 So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

Paul's analogy between savage wolves and false teachers echoes the words of the Lord in Matt

7:15-16: "15 "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." From the Lord's opening sermon on the mountain to the Revelation, the scriptures foretell false prophets and false teachers in their individual, collective, and institutional capacities. Paul foretells an apostasy of worldwide dimensions, powers by Satan himself in 2 Thess 2:8-12:

8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie 12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

Peter and Paul agree that the falling away will be eminent and catastrophic. Paul wrote in 1 Tim 4:1-3:

4 The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. 2 Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. 3 They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods.

Peter concurred in 2 Peter 2:1-2:

2 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them — bringing swift destruction on themselves. 2 Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.

The end of this lawlessness and the institutions that it spawns will be as Paul said, "Whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming." Rev 19:20-21 vividly portrays that end:

20 But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

Paul's Farewell to the Ephesians

Acts 20:32-35

32 "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. 33 I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. 34 You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. 35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Paul's valedictory blesses the Ephesians to the inheritance of the saints, testifies to Paul's own purity and benevolence, and encourages all to help the weak. That he worked to support his co-workers reveals the dedication that Paul had to spread the gospel. The quotation of Christ, "It is more blessed to give than receive," is only in this passage and not in the gospels. Yet, we quote it far more than most scriptures.

Paul's Departure From Ephesus

Acts 20:36-38

36 When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. 37 They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. 38 What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.

The final scene with its sorrow and tears speaks for itself. Paul is off to Jerusalem.

28. On to Jerusalem: Acts 21

Luke closed Acts 20 with an account of Paul's sad departure from Miletus. Acts 20:36-38 captures the sense of the grief of the Ephesian elders:

36 When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. 37 They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. 38 What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.

The final scene of sorrow and tears speaks for itself. Paul is off to Jerusalem.

Paul's Journey to Jerusalem

Acts 21:1-6

21 After we had torn ourselves away from them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Cos. The next day we went to Rhodes and from there to Patara. 2 We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail. 3 After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo. 4 Finding the disciples there, we stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. 5 But when our time was up, we left and continued on our way. All the disciples and their wives and children accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray. 6 After saying good-bye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home.



They found a ship in Patara sailing for Phoenicia, on the Syrian coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Perhaps, as they sailed south of Cyprus, Paul remembered his work there with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus and the sorcerer, Elymas, on his first journey about 10 years ago. Or perhaps he thought of Barnabas, whose home was in Cyprus. [See the notes on Acts 13:1-12.] At Tyre on the seacoast, they found disciples, with whom they stayed for seven days. The entire group of disciples, wives, and children said their *goodbyes* as the group boarded the ship.

Agabus Prophecies Paul's Imprisonment in Jerusalem

Acts 21:7-9

7 We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for a day. 8 Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. 9 He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.

At Caesarea, they stayed with Philip, one of the seven [See notes on Acts 6 and 8]. The fact that the four daughters of Philip prophesied shows that spiritual gifts as listed in 1 Cor 12 were not restricted to men alone.

Paul ordered women to keep silent in the church in 1 Cor 14:33-35:

As in all the congregations of the saints, 34 women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. 35 If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

His use of the phrases *all the congregations, in the churches, and in the church* makes this command applicable only to the assembly and not applicable outside the assembly. The same principle is implicit in his command to Timothy in 1 Tim 2:11-13: "11 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent."

Here, the qualifying phrase is *to teach or to have authority over a man*. It is evident that women had a broad role in prophesying, serving, and teaching. In addition to the women, here, who were prophets, Paul describes Phoebe as a servant in Rom 16:1-3:

16 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant [diakonon; deacon] of the church in Cenchrea. 2 I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.

Any reasonable reading of this passage would have Phoebe in a role beyond that role of *servant* ascribed to all Christians. Priscilla is a clear example of a woman teaching a man in the privacy of the home and not in the assembly. In Acts 18:26, Priscilla taught Apollos along with Aquilla: "When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately."

The church in the 21st century must take special care not to overly limit the work that women can do, thus denying their many talents to the work to the Lord. At the same time, the church must take seriously the commands of Paul regarding women in the assembly.

Acts 21:10-11

10 After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. 11 Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

Agabus, a prophet foretells the Paul's impending fate metaphorically, tying his hand and feet with Paul's belt. The prophecy, which foretells Paul's imprisonment by the Gentiles (Romans), does not prophesy bodily harm. Also important to note is the fact that although Agabus is the prophet, the Holy Spirit speaks. Although Luke does not say so, this Agabus could be that same Agabus who prophesied in Antioch of the impending worldwide famine in Acts 11:28-29:

28 One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.)

Acts 21:12-14

12 When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. 13 Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." 14 When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."

Once again, through Luke's account, we witness the love of the disciples for Paul and the fear

they experience concerning his fate. For Paul’s part, he was willing to suffer and die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. Notice that Paul’s companions, including Luke, were joining in to try to dissuade Paul from going. “The Lord’s will be done,” is reminiscent of the Lord’s own prayer before his offering in Jerusalem in Matt 26:42: “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

Acts 21:15-16

15 After this, we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. 16 Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and brought us to the home of Mnason, where we were to stay. He was a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples.

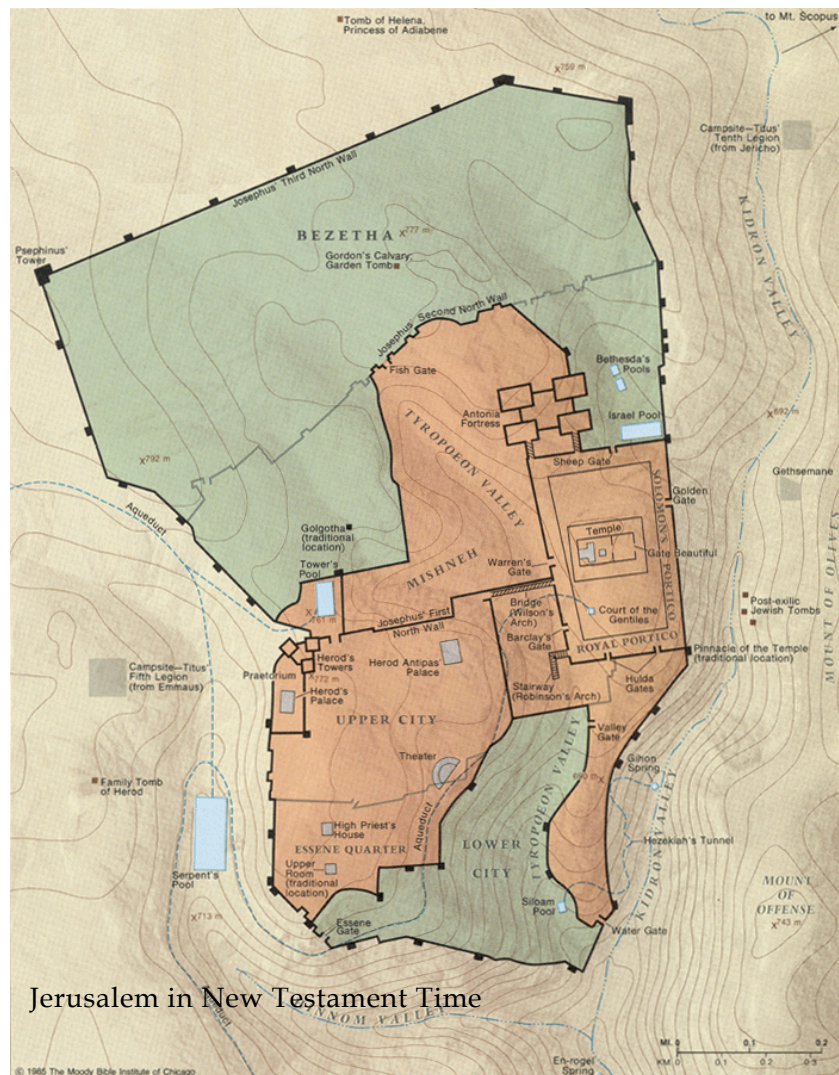
While they were in Jerusalem, they would stay in the home of Mnason.

James Instructs Paul to Join in Purification Rites

Acts 21:17-19

17 When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly. 18 The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. 19 Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

James, and all the elders continue to play the leadership role in the church of Jerusalem. They had conferred on the issue of circumcision with the Antioch church in Acts 15:4: “4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.” It was in that meeting in Acts 15 that James presented the core of what would be their decision—a decision to which he refers in Acts 21:25, below:



25 As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.

Acts 21:20-25

20 When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. 21 They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. 22 What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, 23 so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. 24 Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. 25 As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality."

Luke has already recorded occasions where Paul accommodated the sensitivity of the Jews toward the necessity of keeping the customs of the Jews. However, the controversy here is special since “thousands of Jews have believed,” and they were “all of them. . . zealous for the law.” In addition, rumors had preceded Paul that he was teaching Jews to turn away from Moses and not keep the Jewish customs. James’ instructions were clear: Paul was to join in the purification rites so that the Jews would know that he was living in obedience to the law.

This is not the first time that Paul accommodated the Jewish customs. In Acts 16:1-3, he had Timothy circumcised to avoid conflict with the Jews:

16 He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. 2 The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. 3 Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

In Acts 18:18, Paul took a vow that required that his hair be cut—a vow very similar or the same as the one here in Jerusalem: “Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchræa because of a vow he had taken.” On both occasions, the vows were most probably Nazirite Vows. [See notes on Acts 18:18-22.]

Acts 21:26

26 The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.

Paul purified himself along with men, went to the temple, and made an offering at the end of the days of purification. These actions make very clear that the Lord did not require Jewish Christians to stop keeping the customs of the law. However, Paul kept these customs as a matter of expediency and not as a matter of the law of the gospel. He explained his position clearly in 1 Cor 9:19-22:

19 Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.

Paul was wide ranging in his application of this principle, extending it to Jews, Greeks, and the church of God in 1 Cor 10:31-33:

31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. 32 Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God— 33 even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

Asian Jews Stir up the Crowd against Paul

Acts 21:27-29

27 When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, 28 shouting, "Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple area and defiled this holy place." 29 (They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple area.)

James' hope that the Jewish Christians would accept Paul clearly excluded Jews that were not Christians. For, Jews from Asia immediately stirred up the crowds, falsely accusing Paul alleging that he taught against the law and the temple. They further accused him of bringing Greeks into the temple and defiling it.

Acts 21:30-32

30 The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. 31 While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. 32 He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

The whole city was in turmoil, and they dragged Paul into the temple and tried to kill him. When the Roman troops arrived, the Jews stopped beating Paul.

Paul, Arrested by the Romans, Asks to Speak

Acts 21:33-22:1

33 The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he asked who he was and what he had done. 34 Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another, and since the commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. 35 When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great he had to be carried by the soldiers. 36 The crowd that followed kept shouting, "Away with him!"

37 As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander, "May I say something to you?"

"Do you speak Greek?" he replied. 38 "Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the desert some time ago?"

39 Paul answered, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people."

40 Having received the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic: 22 "Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense."

Acts 21 concludes with Paul's arrest, which, oddly, served as his rescue from death at the

mob's hands. Paul, mistaken at first for an Egyptian terrorist, asked to speak. What follows is the first of Paul's dramatic defenses, which eventually led to his appeal to Caesar and his trip to Rome.

28. On to Jerusalem: Acts 21

Luke closed Acts 20 with an account of Paul's sad departure from Miletus. Acts 20:36-38 captures the sense of the grief of the Ephesian elders:

36 When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. 37 They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. 38 What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.

The final scene of sorrow and tears speaks for itself. Paul is off to Jerusalem.

Paul's Journey to Jerusalem

Acts 21:1-6

21 After we had torn ourselves away from them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Cos. The next day we went to Rhodes and from there to Patara. 2 We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail. 3 After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo. 4 Finding the disciples there, we stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. 5 But when our time was up, we left and continued on our way. All the disciples and their wives and children accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray. 6 After saying good-bye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home.



They found a ship in Patara sailing for Phoenicia, on the Syrian coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Perhaps, as they sailed south of Cyprus, Paul remembered his work there with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus and the sorcerer, Elymas, on his first journey about 10 years ago. Or perhaps he thought of Barnabas, whose home was in Cyprus. [See the notes on Acts 13:1-12.] At Tyre on the seacoast, they found disciples, with whom they stayed for seven days. The entire group of disciples, wives, and children said their *goodbyes* as the group boarded the ship.

Agabus Prophecies Paul's Imprisonment in Jerusalem

Acts 21:7-9

7 We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for a day. 8 Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. 9 He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.

At Caesarea, they stayed with Philip, one of the seven [See notes on Acts 6 and 8]. The fact that the four daughters of Philip prophesied shows that spiritual gifts as listed in 1 Cor 12 were not restricted to men alone.

Paul ordered women to keep silent in the church in 1 Cor 14:33-35:

As in all the congregations of the saints, 34 women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. 35 If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

His use of the phrases *all the congregations, in the churches, and in the church* makes this command applicable only to the assembly and not applicable outside the assembly. The same principle is implicit in his command to Timothy in 1 Tim 2:11-13: "11 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent."

Here, the qualifying phrase is *to teach or to have authority over a man*. It is evident that women had a broad role in prophesying, serving, and teaching. In addition to the women, here, who were prophets, Paul describes Phoebe as a servant in Rom 16:1-3:

16 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant [diakonon; deacon] of the church in Cenchrea. 2 I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.

Any reasonable reading of this passage would have Phoebe in a role beyond that role of *servant* ascribed to all Christians. Priscilla is a clear example of a woman teaching a man in the privacy of the home and not in the assembly. In Acts 18:26, Priscilla taught Apollos along with Aquilla: "When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately."

The church in the 21st century must take special care not to overly limit the work that women can do, thus denying their many talents to the work to the Lord. At the same time, the church must take seriously the commands of Paul regarding women in the assembly.

Acts 21:10-11

10 After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. 11 Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

Agabus, a prophet foretells the Paul's impending fate metaphorically, tying his hand and feet with Paul's belt. The prophecy, which foretells Paul's imprisonment by the Gentiles (Romans), does not prophesy bodily harm. Also important to note is the fact that although Agabus is the prophet, the Holy Spirit speaks. Although Luke does not say so, this Agabus could be that same Agabus who prophesied in Antioch of the impending worldwide famine in Acts 11:28-29:

28 One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.)

Acts 21:12-14

12 When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. 13 Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." 14 When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."

Once again, through Luke's account, we witness the love of the disciples for Paul and the fear

they experience concerning his fate. For Paul’s part, he was willing to suffer and die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. Notice that Paul’s companions, including Luke, were joining in to try to dissuade Paul from going. “The Lord’s will be done,” is reminiscent of the Lord’s own prayer before his offering in Jerusalem in Matt 26:42: “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

Acts 21:15-16

15 After this, we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. 16 Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and brought us to the home of Mnason, where we were to stay. He was a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples.

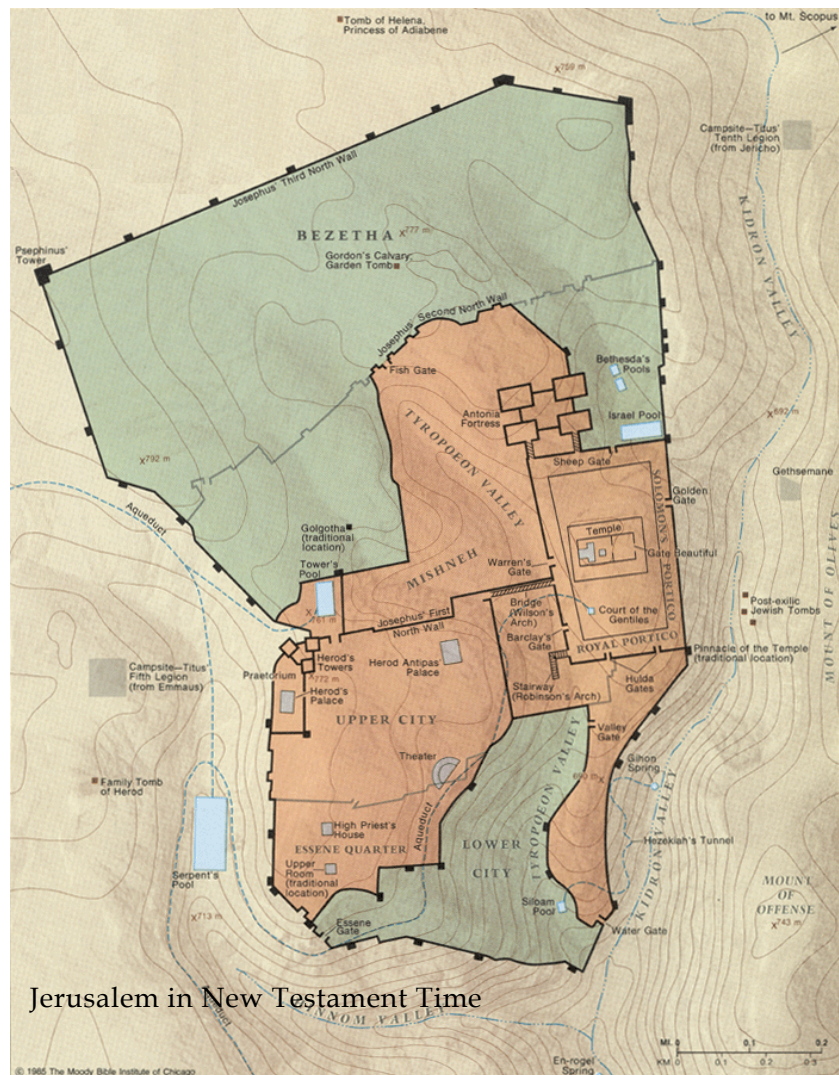
While they were in Jerusalem, they would stay in the home of Mnason.

James Instructs Paul to Join in Purification Rites

Acts 21:17-19

17 When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly. 18 The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. 19 Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

James, and all the elders continue to play the leadership role in the church of Jerusalem. They had conferred on the issue of circumcision with the Antioch church in Acts 15:4: “4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.” It was in that meeting in Acts 15 that James presented the core of what would be their decision—a decision to which he refers in Acts 21:25, below:



25 As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.

Acts 21:20-25

20 When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. 21 They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. 22 What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, 23 so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. 24 Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. 25 As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality."

Luke has already recorded occasions where Paul accommodated the sensitivity of the Jews toward the necessity of keeping the customs of the Jews. However, the controversy here is special since “thousands of Jews have believed,” and they were “all of them. . . zealous for the law.” In addition, rumors had preceded Paul that he was teaching Jews to turn away from Moses and not keep the Jewish customs. James’ instructions were clear: Paul was to join in the purification rites so that the Jews would know that he was living in obedience to the law.

This is not the first time that Paul accommodated the Jewish customs. In Acts 16:1-3, he had Timothy circumcised to avoid conflict with the Jews:

16 He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. 2 The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. 3 Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

In Acts 18:18, Paul took a vow that required that his hair be cut—a vow very similar or the same as the one here in Jerusalem: “Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchræa because of a vow he had taken.” On both occasions, the vows were most probably Nazirite Vows. [See notes on Acts 18:18-22.]

Acts 21:26

26 The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.

Paul purified himself along with men, went to the temple, and made an offering at the end of the days of purification. These actions make very clear that the Lord did not require Jewish Christians to stop keeping the customs of the law. However, Paul kept these customs as a matter of expediency and not as a matter of the law of the gospel. He explained his position clearly in 1 Cor 9:19-22:

19 Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.

Paul was wide ranging in his application of this principle, extending it to Jews, Greeks, and the church of God in 1 Cor 10:31-33:

31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. 32 Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God— 33 even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

Asian Jews Stir up the Crowd against Paul

Acts 21:27-29

27 When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, 28 shouting, "Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple area and defiled this holy place." 29 (They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple area.)

James' hope that the Jewish Christians would accept Paul clearly excluded Jews that were not Christians. For, Jews from Asia immediately stirred up the crowds, falsely accusing Paul alleging that he taught against the law and the temple. They further accused him of bringing Greeks into the temple and defiling it.

Acts 21:30-32

30 The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. 31 While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. 32 He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

The whole city was in turmoil, and they dragged Paul into the temple and tried to kill him. When the Roman troops arrived, the Jews stopped beating Paul.

Paul, Arrested by the Romans, Asks to Speak

Acts 21:33-22:1

33 The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he asked who he was and what he had done. 34 Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another, and since the commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. 35 When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great he had to be carried by the soldiers. 36 The crowd that followed kept shouting, "Away with him!"

37 As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander, "May I say something to you?"

"Do you speak Greek?" he replied. 38 "Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the desert some time ago?"

39 Paul answered, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people."

40 Having received the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic: 22 "Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense."

Acts 21 concludes with Paul's arrest, which, oddly, served as his rescue from death at the

mob's hands. Paul, mistaken at first for an Egyptian terrorist, asked to speak. What follows is the first of Paul's dramatic defenses, which eventually led to his appeal to Caesar and his trip to Rome.

29. Paul Greeted Controversy and Violence in Jerusalem: Acts 22

Acts 21 found Paul going through purification rites at the request of James and the elders, attacked by a mob, and threatened by a beating at the hands of the Roman commander. Paul appealed to the commander for permission to speak to the crowd. Having received permission, Paul spoke to the Jews in Aramaic, their common language in Acts 21:40-22:1:

40 Having received the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic: 22 "Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense."

That Paul could speak Greek to the commander and Aramaic to the crowd attest to his broad education which equipped him for the next trying years in his life from Jerusalem to Rome. This defense is the first of Paul's dramatic defenses, which eventually lead to his appeal to Caesar and his trip to Rome, and which saved his life from being taken by the Jews.

Paul's Credentials as a Jew

Acts 22:1-5

1 "Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense."

2 When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet.

Then Paul said: 3 "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. 4 I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, 5 as also the high priest and all the Council can testify. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

Paul begins his defense by addressing the audience as brothers and fathers and with the plea that they listen to him. His address, plus his speaking in Aramaic, their own language, gave him an initial advantage so that they became very quiet.

Paul seeks further credibility by stating the facts of his life as a Jew—facts that many, especially those “fathers” would remember. He was a Jew born in Tarsus but educated under Gamaliel, who was described in Acts 5:34: “34 A Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin. . . .” Paul stated that he was thoroughly trained in the law and zealous to the extent that he persecuted and arrested followers of the Way. He could claim credibility from the high priest and all the Council since they had endorsed him, providing him letters to bind Christians in Damascus and bring them to Jerusalem for punishment. One would have to say that Paul is off to a very good start in presenting his case.

Paul Tells of Seeing the Lord

Acts 22:6-11

6 "About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. 7 I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?'

8 "'Who are you, Lord?'" I asked.

"I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 9 My companions saw the light, but

they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.

10 *"What shall I do, Lord?" I asked.*

"Get up," the Lord said, "and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do." 11 My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

Luke's previous account of Paul's conversion appeared in Acts 9. In this present account (Acts 22), Paul raises two questions, which all men need to ask: *Who are you, Lord? And What shall I do, Lord?* Until people recognize Jesus as Lord, they cannot progress toward their repentance, confession, and baptism. The eunuch made the good confession of his faith in Acts 8:37: "Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' The eunuch answered, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'" On the day of Pentecost and after Peter's sermon, the listeners asked this same question. Their belief was manifest since they were cut to the heart in Acts 2:37-38:

37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

Confronted by such belief, Paul asked what he should do. As with all converts, Paul had to hear the gospel; therefore, the Lord told him to go to Damascus where he **would be told** what to do.

Ananias Tells Paul What to Do to Be Saved

Acts 22:12-16

12 *"A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. 13 He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him.*

14 *"Then he said: 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. 15 You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'*

Now Ananias was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews—a fact adding to Paul's credibility. While Ananias was able to allow Paul to see, neither he nor the miracle on the road to Damascus could save Paul. While God had chosen Paul to know his will, to see the Righteous One, to hear words from the mouth of the Righteous One, and to be a witness to what he had seen and heard, God did not save Paul directly. With great urgency—"Now what are you waiting for?"—Ananias told Paul what to do to be saved: "Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name." *Calling* is a present participle signifying a time corresponding to the time of the main verb. In this case, there are three verbs all with the same understood *you* as subject, signifying a direct command. How does one call on the name of the Lord? Get up! Be baptized! Wash away your sins! Nothing less will do, for there is no other way to call upon the name of the Lord. From the very beginning when the gospel was preached in Acts 2 Peter quoted the prophet Joel in Acts 2:21 to show that one must call on the name of the Lord

21 And everyone who calls

on the name of the Lord will be saved.

As a result, the hearers of his teaching were baptized. In Rom 10:12-13, Paul also cited Joel:

12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13 for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Just as they were required to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38) on the day of Pentecost, Paul is required to arise and be baptized, washing away his sins. None of this should come as a surprise, since the Lord taught Nicodemus the very same thing in John 3:5: “5 Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of **water** and the **Spirit**.” Paul also taught that Christians, collectively in the church, had been washed with the water and the word in Eph 5:25-27:

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with **water** through the **word**, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

In Rom 6:3-7, Paul taught that baptism is the exact point where sin is done away:

3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that **the body of sin might be done away** with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – 7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

[Emphasis added in these verses.]

Next, Paul turns his narrative to what happened when he returned to Jerusalem.

The Lord to Send Paul to the Gentiles

Acts 22:17-21

17 "When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance 18 and saw the Lord speaking. 'Quick!' he said to me. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me.'

19 "'Lord,' I replied, 'these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. 20 And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.' 21 "Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"

Paul picks up his narrative with the time when he returned to Jerusalem after his conversion. Apparently, he had gone in to Arabia for a time before coming to Jerusalem. He reported in Gal 1:15-17

15 But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased 16 to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.

After three years, he visited Jerusalem, staying fifteen days:

18 Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. 19 I saw none of the other apostles — only James, the Lord's brother. 20 I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. 21 Later I went to Syria and Cilicia.

Luke also reported these same facts in his account of Paul's conversion in Acts 9:19-30. The map of Paul's early travels charts these trips.

The Crowd Rejects Paul Who Appeals to His Roman Citizenship

Acts 22:22-26

22 *The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!"*

23 *As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, 24 the commander ordered Paul to be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and questioned in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this. 25 As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?"*

26 *When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. "What are you going to do?" he asked. "This man is a Roman citizen."*

The flash point for the crowd of Jews seems to be Paul's declaration that the Lord was sending him to Gentiles. They literally threw a fit—shouting, throwing off their cloaks, and flinging dust in the air—we might say, "Stomped the ground."

The commander ordered that Paul be tortured to get at the truth of why they were shouting at him. As they readied to flog him, Paul raised the question of his Roman citizenship to the centurion. Later, this issue proved to save Paul's life and give him a passport to Rome. The centurion raised the issue with the commander.

Acts 22:27-29

27 *The commander went to Paul and asked, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?"*

"Yes, I am," he answered.

28 *Then the commander said, "I had to pay a big price for my citizenship."*

"But I was born a citizen," Paul replied.



29 *Those who were about to question him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.*

The status of Paul as a Roman citizen changes entirely the dynamics of the confrontation. The commander knew enough to understand that he had violated the law of Rome, but he still had to deal with what might become an insurrection among the Jews. For Paul to be a citizen by birth shows that his father was a Jew who was also a Roman citizen. Now the commander orders Paul to stand before the Sanhedrin.

Paul Stands Before the Sanhedrin and High Priests

Acts 22:30

30 *The next day, since the commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them.*

The desire of the commander to know exactly what the Jews had against Paul set the stage for Paul to stand before the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin—those very people who had authorized Paul to persecute Christians in the first place. The Sanhedrin was the supreme council and tribunal of the Jews, headed by a High Priest and having religious, civil, and criminal jurisdiction (Webster's Online Dictionary). The Jews considered the origin of the Sanhedrin to be in Num 11:16: "16 The Lord said to Moses: "Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the Tent of Meeting that they may stand there with you."

The stage is once again set for Paul to defend himself in Acts 23, this time, before the Sanhedrin.

30. Paul Appears before the Sanhedrin: Acts 23

In Acts 22, the Jews tried to kill Paul, but the Roman commander intervened. He had ordered Paul beaten in order to find out what he had done to cause all the trouble. The centurion in charge discovered that Paul was a Roman citizen and told the commander. Since it was unlawful to punish a Roman citizen without a trial, the commander brought Paul before the Sanhedrin. Acts 22:30 tells of this:

30 The next day, since the commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them.

As the comments on Acts 22 have noted, the Sanhedrin was the supreme council and tribunal of the Jews, headed by a High Priest and having religious, civil, and criminal jurisdiction (Webster's Online Dictionary). The Jews considered the origin of their council to be in Num 11:16: "16 The Lord said to Moses: "Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the Tent of Meeting that they may stand there with you." However, the Romans established ruling councils in their conquered territories composed of 71 citizens and called the Sanhedrin—a word of Greek origin. The gospels do not use this Greek word in the early days of Christ's ministry, causing some to suggest that the Romans established this council to counteract the abuses of Herod. Whatever the case, the chief priests and elders of the Jews made up the tribunal before which Paul is to appear.

Paul defends himself in Acts 23, this time, before the Sanhedrin.

Paul Appears before the Sanhedrin

Acts 23:1

23 1 Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day."

When Paul speaks of his good conscience, he uses a word that has the same meaning in Latin and Greek. In both languages, and thus, in English, the word is a compound word from a preposition that means *with* and a verb that means *to know*. Therefore, conscience is a knowing together with oneself, according to a standard internalized by teaching or intuition. For all men, the violation of the conscience results in guilt. Once true worshipers are cleansed, they no longer feel the guilt of sin, according to Heb 10:2: "For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins." Heb 10:19-23 details how the conversion of the saints cleanses the conscience:

19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

The culmination of conversion ends with the washing of water (baptism). Peter wrote in agreement with Paul in 1 Peter 3:21-22:

21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also — not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ

Our conscience, like Paul's, verifies the righteousness of our acts, measuring them against the commands of the gospel. However, when Paul was a practicing Jew, his conscience was also approving of his acts, even though he murdered and slaughtered Christians. One's conscience can only be the guide to matters of religion when the standard against which it makes judgments is the New Testament.

In 2 Cor 1:12-13, Paul's conscience testified to him according to the holiness and sincerity that are from God. Using any other standard to approve acts may provide a good conscience, but it will not justify one before God:

12 Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace.

Christians, who conduct themselves with the "holiness and sincerity that are from God", need never to have guilt feelings or a guilty conscience.

Acts 23:2-5

2 *At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. 3 Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!"*

4 *Those who were standing near Paul said, "You dare to insult God's high priest?"*

5 *Paul replied, "Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.'"*

That the high priest Ananias could order that they strike Paul shows the degree to which the Romans delegated power to the Sanhedrin. They could even pronounce a death penalty; however, such a penalty needed the additional approval of the Roman governor. Paul's response was a similar condemnation to the one Jesus gave in Matt 23:27-28:

27 *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. 28 In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.*

Apparently, the law to which Paul referred was Roman law, which forbade striking a citizen without trial. Since Paul had just arrived in Jerusalem after several years of absence, he would not know who the high priest was. When it was called to his attention, he immediately apologized, citing the Old Testament law of the Jews in Ex 22:28: "28 Do not blaspheme God or curse the ruler of your people."

Paul Turns Their Attention to the Resurrection

Acts 23:6-8

6 *Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead." 7 When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. 8 (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.)*

Paul called on the differences between the Sadducees and the Pharisees to divide the assembly, since as verse 8 defines them, "Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all." Paul himself was a Pharisee and so was his father. Paul had come out of the Jewish community in Tarsus, which had been highly respected by the Romans, who had made many of the Jews Roman citizens. His father being a Pharisee partially explains why Paul went as a youth to study at the feet of the leading scholar Gamaliel. In his defense in Acts 22:2b-3, Paul cited this fact as part of his credentials: "Then Paul said: 3 "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today."

Division in the assembly ensued.

The Pharisees Side with Paul

Acts 23:9-10

9 There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. "We find nothing wrong with this man," they said. "What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?" 10 The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks.

The chaos that followed had the Pharisees defending Paul, on the basis that he could be inspired, hearing from a spirit or an angel, since they believed in such beings. The crowd became so hostile that the commander had to rescue Paul lest the angry crowd tear him to pieces. The troops took Paul by force and brought him to the barracks.

The Lord Visits Paul

Acts 23:11

11 The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."

From this point on, as the narrative covers Paul's trials in Jerusalem and Judea, the readers know that the Jews will not be successful in harming Paul, for the Lord is taking him to testify in Rome. Paul had previously aspired to go to Rome in Acts 19:21: "21 After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. 'After I have been there,' he said, 'I must visit Rome also.'" Later in his letter to the Romans in Rom 1:14-15, Paul expressed both his desire and obligation to preach in Rome: "14 I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. 15 That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome."

The Jews Conspire to Murder Paul

Acts 23:12-22

12 The next morning the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. 13 More than forty men were involved in this plot. 14 They went to the chief priests and elders and said, "We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul. 15 Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here."

16 But when the son of Paul's sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul.

17 Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, "Take this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him." 18 So he took him to the commander.

The centurion said, "Paul, the prisoner, sent for me and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you."

19 The commander took the young man by the hand, drew him aside and asked, "What is it you want to tell me?"

20 He said: "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul before the Sanhedrin tomorrow on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about him. 21 Don't give in to them, because more than forty of them are waiting in ambush for him. They have taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are ready now, waiting for your consent to their request."

22 The commander dismissed the young man and cautioned him, "Don't tell anyone that you have reported this to me."

Luke tells perfectly the story of how the Jews plotted to murder Paul, of how the chief priests and elders were enablers and co-conspirators, and of how Paul, with the help of his nephew, foiled the plot.

These events of trial and abuse in Jerusalem would certainly be similar to those troubles that he describes fully in 2 Cor 6:3-10, where we gain understanding about how very hard it was for him:

3 We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. 4 Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; 5 in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; 6 in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; 7 in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; 8 through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; 9 known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; 10 sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

Paul barely escapes with his life.

The Commander Sends Paul to Governor Felix

Acts 23:23-30

23 Then he called two of his centurions and ordered them, "Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. 24 Provide mounts for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix."

25 He wrote a letter as follows:

26 Claudius Lysias,

To His Excellency, Governor Felix:

Greetings. 27 This man was seized by the Jews and they were about to kill him, but I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen. 28 I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I brought him to their Sanhedrin. 29 I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their law, but there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment.

30 When I was informed of a plot to be carried out against the man, I sent him to you at once. I also ordered his accusers to present to you their case against him.

The commander was taking no chance of losing his prisoner—a Roman citizen—to the Jews. He assigned an inordinately large attachment of soldiers to protect Paul as he journeyed to Caesarea where they were to give over Paul to the Roman governor, Felix. He also insured Paul's security even the more by having them leave at night.

In his letter, the commander attests that he found no guilt in Paul worthy of death, since the violations asserted against him were of the Jewish law. The commander had also ordered the accusers to appear before Felix to present their charges.

The stage is set for Paul's defense before Felix.

Governor Felix Agrees to Hear Paul

Acts 23:31-35

31 So the soldiers, carrying out their orders, took Paul with them during the night and brought him as far as Antipatris. 32 The next day they let the cavalry go on with him, while they returned to the barracks. 33 When the cavalry arrived in Caesarea, they delivered the letter to the governor and handed Paul over to him. 34 The governor read the letter and asked what province he was from. Learning that he was from Cilicia, 35 he said, "I will hear your case when your accusers get here." Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod's palace.

In his previous encounters, Paul had cited his province, Cilicia, in an effort to advance his credibility with the Jews. In Acts 21:39, he said, "39 Paul answered, 'I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people.'" Further in Acts 22:2b-3, he repeated, "Then Paul said: 3 'I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today.'"

Felix seemed to know immediately the importance of his being a Roman citizen from Cilicia. Paul benefited in two ways: the hearing would occur right away, as soon as his accusers arrived, and his quarters would be in Herod's palace and not in a common jail. The Romans continue to extend such courtesies even during his imprisonment in Rome which Acts 28:30-31 describes:

30 For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. 31 Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 24 chronicles Paul's defense before Felix, after whom he will appear before Porcius Festus, a governor, and Agrippa, the king.

31. Paul's Defense before Felix: Acts 24

Acts 23 closed with Felix agreeing to hear Paul, after he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen from the important province of Cilicia. The hearing was to occur as soon as his accusers arrived. In the meantime, Paul received quarters in Herod's palace.

Acts 24 will tell of Paul's defense before Felix and Felix's response to it.

Ananias and Some of the Jewish Elders Bring Charges

Acts 24:1-4

24 Five days later the high priest Ananias went down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor. 2 When Paul was called in, Tertullus presented his case before Felix: "We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation. 3 Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude. 4 But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly.

When Ananias and some of the elders arrived with a lawyer named Tertullus, they brought charges against Paul. Tertullus, by his name, was most likely Roman, and thus, an ideal person to bring their case before Felix a Roman governor. Tertullus is very courteous and complementary to Felix, signaling that he thinks this is a minor case and will not take much time.

Acts 24:5-9

5 "We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect 6 and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him. 8 By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him."

9 The Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were true.

The charges were fourfold according to Tertullus: Paul was a troublemaker; he stirred up riots among the Jews all over the world; he was a ringleader of the Nazarene sect; and he tried to desecrate the temple. It is interesting to note that Tertullus switched the burden of proof from him and the Jews to the governor: "By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges." Jurisprudence suggests that he who alleges must prove. Of equal interest in this passage is the use of the term, *Nazarene sect*. The Bible uses the term *Nazarene* four times – one time being in this present passage. In Matt 2:22-23, the word alludes the Old Testament prophecies – apparently lost now – which foretold that Christ would be called a Nazarene:

Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, 23 and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."

During Peter's time of denial, a servant girl spoke of his association with that Nazarene, Jesus, in Mark 14:66-68:

66 While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. 67 When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him.

"You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus," she said.

Later in Mark 16:6-7, one who was apparently an angel called the Lord, Jesus the Nazarene:

6 "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him."

Although the references are few, by the time of Paul's defense the Jews looked upon the Christians as the sect of the Nazarene, indicating that they thought of the church as an extreme group of Jews. While one might say, "church of the Nazarene [Jesus Christ]", the term lacks the approval of direct scripture and apostolic example given to the name church [called out] of Christ. Jesus himself said in Matt 16:18: "18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build **my** church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." Paul referred to all the local churches in Rom 16:16: "16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the **churches of Christ** send greetings." [Emphasis added]

Verse 14 in the following paragraphs makes clear the Paul rejects the thought that the church is a sect. The word Nazarene identifies a sect. Paul rejects the word Nazarene to describe the church.

Paul Makes His Defense before Felix

Acts 24:10-16

10 When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied: "I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so I gladly make my defense. 11 You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. 12 My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. 13 And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. 14 However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, 15 and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. 16 So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

After answering the charges by stating that he did not argue with anyone nor stir up any crowd. He affirmed that he worships God of our fathers as a follower of the Way. The translators capitalized *way*, implying that it is a proper noun. *Way* here means way of obedience and living. The word appears twice in this chapter. In Acts 24:22, Luke shows Felix as knowledgeable about the Christian way of life: "22 Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. " The word *Way* also appears in Acts 19:9: "9 But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way." And again, in Acts 19:23: "23 About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way." Paul used the word in his defense in Acts 22:24: "4 I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison."

Vine defines *Way* as "the course followed and characterized by the followers of Christ, Acts 9:2; 19:9,23; 24:22." (from *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.) In his defense, Paul outlines a course that he followed where he believed the things agreed with the Law and were written in the Prophets, and that he has a hope in God that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

The idea that the wicked will be raised collides with the religious sects of today who believe that once the righteous and the wicked die that is the literal end of life for them:

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that a person is the soul the Bible speaks of, and when a person dies nothing lives on, the person is dead and is conscious of nothing. When the

time comes for God to resurrect them from the dead He will create a new body for them from His memory. . . .

They totally deny the existence of the traditional Christian view of Hell. Satan is regarded as having created the concept of Hellfire in order to turn people against God. They believe that hell is the "common grave of mankind" where people go when they die. They are not conscious there. Unbelievers simply cease to exist at death. Believers remain in death until the resurrection.

www.towerwatch.com/Witnesses/Beliefs/their_beliefs.htm

Paul's final point was that he strove always to keep a clear conscience. Paul had made this strong point about his conscience in Act 23:1 in his defense before the Sanhedrin: "1 Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day." [Notes on Acts 23:1 discusses the meaning of the word *conscience*.]

Acts 24:17-21

17 "After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. 18 I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance. 19 But there are some Jews from the province of Asia, who ought to be here before you and bring charges if they have anything against me. 20 Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin – 21 unless it was this one thing I shouted as I stood in their presence: 'It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.'"

Paul brings Felix up to date on what happened in Jerusalem when he arrived there just 12 days ago to worship [See Acts 24:11]. The gifts for the poor were the contributions from the churches on Paul's last missionary trip, which are discussed completely in 2 Cor 8 and 9. At the suggestion of James and the elders, Paul went through the purification rites at the temple. Paul asserts that he was not involved in any disturbance, but that it was some Jews from Asia, who had caused the uproar. Paul admitted shouting before the Sanhedrin: "It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today."

Felix and Paul after the Proceedings

Acts 24:22-23

22 Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. "When Lysias the commander comes," he said, "I will decide your case." 23 He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs.

Felix who was well acquainted with the Way adjourned the proceedings, having decided to wait to hear the testimony of (Claudius) Lysias, the commander. Paul was not free completely, but he did have the right to have his needs taken care of by his friends. According to verse 27, he was kept in this imprisoned state for two years.

Acts 24:24-26

24 Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. 25 As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, "That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you." 26 At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him.

Several days into Paul's imprisonment, Felix and his wife Drusilla came, sent for Paul, and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. Paul's discourse had three divisions: righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come. This discourse by Paul reflects to the teaching of Jesus in John 16:8-11:

8 When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; 10 in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; 11 and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

The two statements differ only on the elements of self-control and sin; however according to James in James 1:13-15, a lack of self-control leads to sin:

13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Paul describes the acts of the sin and righteousness. Of sin, he teaches in Gal 5:19-21:

19 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Of righteousness, he teaches in Gal 5:22-26:

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

The New Testament teaches the judgment of the resurrection of the righteous and the sinful in most every chapter. Remember, claiming the resurrection disturbed the Sadducees and resulted in the events leading up to this discussion with Felix and Drusilla. Paul had much to say in his letters about the judgment. In 2 Cor 5:10, he spoke of the certainty of judgment: "10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." In 2 Thess 1:6-10, he spoke graphically of the punishment of the judgment:

6 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power 10 on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

The writer of the Hebrew letter made the judgment just as certain as death in Heb 9:27-28

27 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, 28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

One can only surmise what Paul said in this discourse, but it is certain that Felix listened and was afraid (some versions read, terrified). He was not so afraid as to be provoked to obey the gospel. No, Felix looked for a more convenient season. He was really looking for a bribe and so much so that he called Paul to talk frequently. Felix compares to one of the people in the parable of the sower in Matt 13:22-23: "2 The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful."

The Lord taught us to shake the dust off our feet when people continually refuse the gospel. Matt 10:14-16 tells of his command to the disciples when he sent them on the limited commission:

14 If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. 15 I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. 16 I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.

During his journeys, Paul repeatedly left the Jews when they refused to hear the gospel and turned to the Gentiles.

Of course, here Paul is the prisoner of Felix, and, therefore, he is at the command of Felix

Paul Continues in Prison

Acts 24:27

27 When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favor to the Jews, he left Paul in prison.

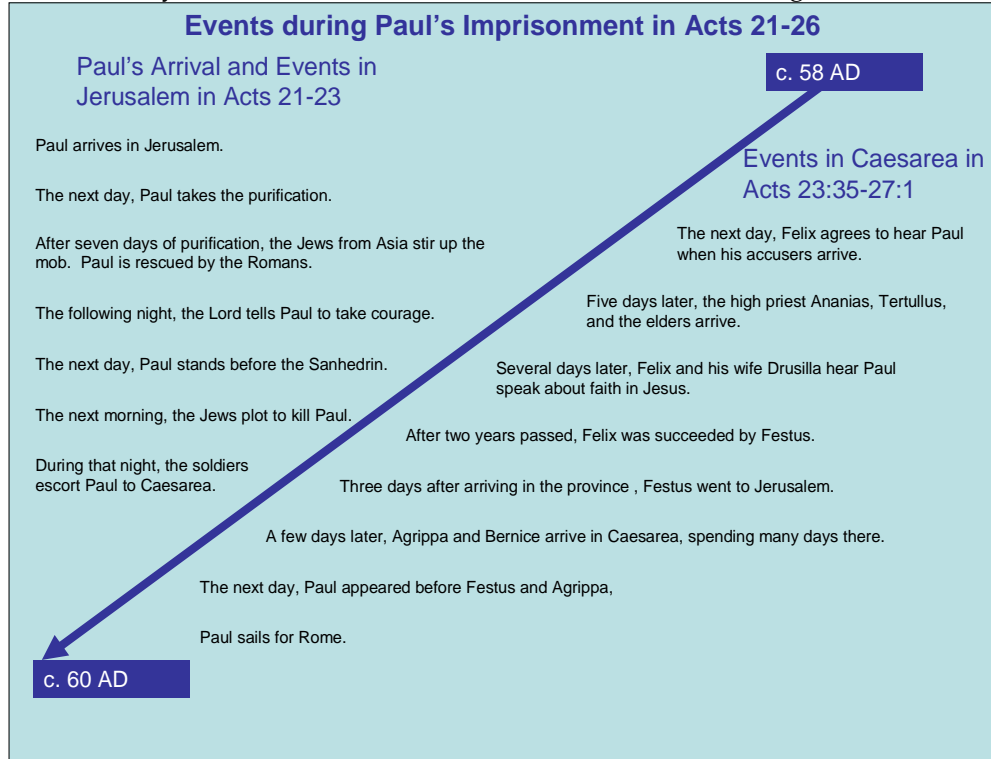
Felix was a man who sought his own advantage. He first wanted money from Paul, and now when he is leaving office, he grants a favor to the Jews in order to cozy up to them. Since he is a completely unprincipled man, he leaves Paul, an innocent man in prison.

The governor who succeeds Felix is Festus, before whom Paul will appear in Acts 25.

32. Festus Succeeds Felix and Asks Agrippa to Hear Paul: Acts 25

Acts 24 closed in verse 27, telling of how Festus succeeded Felix: “27 When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favor to the Jews, he left Paul in prison.” Even as he left office Felix was still seeking political gain by giving the Jews what they wanted which was to keep Paul in prison. This transferred the responsibility for Paul to Festus.

The chart—*Events during Paul’s Imprisonment*—at the right covers the events in Paul’s life as a prisoner, in



chronological order, during his time of imprisonments in Jerusalem and in Caesarea

Acts 25 will show how Festus handled Paul’s case, prior to sending him to Caesar and how he sought an advantage by including King Agrippa. Paul’s defense before Agrippa will come in Acts 26.

Jews Present Charges against Paul and Plot to Kill Him

Acts 25:1-5

25 Three days after arriving in the province, Festus went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem, 2 where the chief priests and Jewish leaders appeared before him and presented the charges against Paul. 3 They urgently requested Festus, as a favor to them, to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem, for they were preparing an ambush to kill him along the way. 4 Festus answered, "Paul is being held at Caesarea, and I myself am going there soon. 5 Let some of your leaders come with me and press charges against the man there, if he has done anything wrong."

The Jewish leaders immediately pressed Festus to bring Paul to Jerusalem. Once again, the Jewish leaders plan to kill Paul. The first occasion was when the Jews seized Paul near the temple in Acts 21:31: “31 While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar.” The second occasion was when forty men conspired to kill him in Acts 23:13-15:

13 More than forty men were involved in this plot. 14 They went to the chief priests and elders and said, "We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have

killed Paul. 15 Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here."

Drawing on their political influence, the Jewish leaders still plot to kill Paul by requesting that Festus move Paul, so that they can kill him along the way. Festus, as Felix before him, asks the Jewish leaders to press charges against Paul in Caesarea, thus saving Paul's life.

Paul Defends Himself before Festus and Appeals to Caesar

Acts 25:6-8

6 After spending eight or ten days with them, he went down to Caesarea, and the next day he convened the court and ordered that Paul be brought before him. 7 When Paul appeared, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many serious charges against him, which they could not prove.

8 Then Paul made his defense: "I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar."

As it should have been, the burden of proof was on the Jewish leaders. However, when Festus convened the court, the Jewish leaders brought many serious charges, but they could not prove them.

Paul's defense was plain and straightforward: "I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar."

Acts 25:9-12

9 Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?"

10 Paul answered: "I am now standing before Caesar's court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. 11 If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!"

12 After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: "You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!"

Even though the Jews could not prove their charges, the politics of the day ruled. Festus, once again like Felix, sought the favor of the Jews, asking Paul to stand trial in Jerusalem. Paul, perhaps knowing that the Jews would try once again to kill him, refused to be tried in Jerusalem. Paul's defense asserted that he had a right to be tried in Caesar's court, that he had done nothing wrong to the Jews, and that no one has a right to hand him over to the Jews. By saying to Festus, "As you yourself know very well," Paul placed the burden on Festus to go against the Jews, presenting Festus with the same dilemma as the one Felix had. How does one please the Jews and uphold Roman law at the same time?

Before Festus could respond, Paul appealed to Caesar. Even though Festus said that Paul would go to Caesar, he continued to seek a way to please the Jews.

Festus Discusses Paul's Case with King Agrippa

Acts 25:13-15

13 A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus. 14 Since they were spending many days there, Festus discussed Paul's case with the king. He said: "There is a man here whom Felix left as a prisoner. 15 When I went to Jerusalem, the chief priests and elders of the Jews brought charges against him and asked that he be condemned.

King Agrippa here is actually Herod Agrippa II, son of Herod Agrippa I, who was wicked in his persecution of the church. Herod Agrippa I died in 44 AD after having James put to death in Acts 12:1-3:

12 It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. 2 He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. 3 When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also.

The Lord struck Herod Agrippa I with a horrible death in Acts 12:21-24:

21 On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. 22 They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." 23 Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.

24 But the word of God continued to increase and spread.

Agrippa (II), who came to power in 48 AD, favored the Jewish people and espoused their causes. By 55 AD, the Romans extended the territory of his rule to restore the kingdom to the borders, as they had been in the time of Herod the great, shown on the map below.

Agrippa treated the Jews well and was indeed a Jew himself. His aunt was the Jewess Drusilla, the wife of Felix, who had also shown great interest in Paul. When Paul appears before Agrippa, Agrippa is influential with both Jews and Romans—an influence that will quickly wane in the coming decade, as the Jewish rebellion against Rome heightens and then climaxes with the destruction of Jerusalem just 10 years later in 70 AD. [Notes on this paragraph were taken from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright © 1996, 2003, 2006 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.]



Festus brought the case of Paul up before King Agrippa, stating that the Jews had brought charges and wished that Paul be condemned.

Acts 25:16-17

16 "I told them that it is not the Roman custom to hand over any man before he has faced his accusers and has had an opportunity to defend himself against their charges. 17 When they came here with me, I did not delay the case, but convened the court the next day and ordered the man to be brought in. 18 When his accusers got up to speak, they did not charge him with any of the crimes I had expected. 19 Instead, they had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive. 20 I was at a loss how to investigate such matters; so I asked if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial there on these charges. 21 When Paul made his appeal to be held over for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him held until I could send him to Caesar." 22 Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I would like to hear this man myself." He replied, "Tomorrow you will hear him."

Festus informed Agrippa of the events that had transpired concerning Paul. From Festus' point of view, the Jews had not charged Paul with any crimes as he had expected. The points of dispute were about their own religion and about the resurrection of Jesus (a dead man who lives). Although Festus had already decided to hold Paul until he could send him to Caesar, Agrippa chose to hear him for himself. They set the hearing for the next day.

Festus Has No Definite Charges against Paul to Report to Caesar

Acts 25: 23-27

23 The next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the audience room with the high ranking officers and the leading men of the city. At the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. 24 Festus said: "King Agrippa, and all who are present with us, you see this man! The whole Jewish community has petitioned me about him in Jerusalem and here in Caesarea, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. 25 I found he had done nothing deserving of death, but because he made his appeal to the Emperor I decided to send him to Rome. 26 But I have nothing definite to write to His Majesty about him. Therefore I have brought him before all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that as a result of this investigation I may have something to write. 27 For I think it is unreasonable to send on a prisoner without specifying the charges against him."

The respect and favor with which the Romans viewed Agrippa show in the way the high ranking officers and the leading men of the city came out for this audience with the king. Festus, caught between the figurative "rock and a hard place," sought only to find something that he could write about Paul to send on to the Roman court. By his own admission, Paul had done nothing wrong. All the efforts of Felix and Festus to placate the Jews had gone wrong. Even though these two governors sought the favor of the Jews by keeping the innocent Paul in prison, relations between Rome and Jerusalem will continue to degenerate over the next 10 years, culminating with the Jewish rebellion and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Finally, during that decade, Agrippa had to give up on the Jews and side with the Romans, who scattered the Jews everywhere because of the destructive war.

Acts 26:1

26 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself."

Acts 26 begins with Agrippa giving Paul permission to speak. His defense will follow.

33. Paul's Defense before Agrippa: Acts 26

Acts 25 closed with Festus trying to use King Agrippa to get charges on Paul to send along with him to Rome. As noted, the Romans and Festus held Agrippa in respect. Agrippa also held the respect of the Jews, making him a good last chance to get something on Paul. Festus announced publicly that the whole Jewish community was demanding Paul's life. Festus also announced publicly that he had found nothing in Paul's actions worthy of death. As previously studied, Festus was between the figurative "rock and a hard place," seeking anything on Paul that he could write about him to send on to the Roman court. Acts 26:1 begins: "26 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself."

Paul Praises Agrippa

Acts 26:1-3

26 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself."

So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defense: 2 "King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews, 3 and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.

Paul recognized the value of a hearing before a king who held the favor of the Jews. It is interesting that Paul says that his defense will be *against all the accusations of the Jews*, when in actuality Paul only defends his position on the resurrection of the dead. Paul made special notice that Agrippa was well acquainted with the Jewish customs and controversy, a fact that made Agrippa an excellent judge. Paul's compliments and flattery seemed aimed at getting Agrippa to listen patiently.

The Resurrection of the Dead—God's Promise to the Fathers

Acts 26:4-5

4 "The Jews all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem. 5 They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee.

Paul began this defense as he had begun the one before Felix, by stating his credentials as a Jew of prominence and as a fervent Pharisee, who had persecuted the church. Agrippa would have been knowledgeable of Paul's life, prior to his conversion. Luke had previously recorded earlier events where Saul—now Paul—persecuted the church. In Acts 8:1, he gave approval to Stephen's death: "8 And Saul was there, giving approval to his death." In Acts 8:3, he was laying waste the church: "3 But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison." According to Luke in Acts 9:1-2, again, Paul obtained letters from the high priest to imprison Christians:

1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

Acts 26:6-8

6 And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers that I am on trial today. 7

This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. O king, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me. 8 Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?

Paul made two important points in this initial statement: he is on trial for his hope, the hope of the fathers and the twelve tribes of Israel; and it should not seem incredible that God raises the dead. The hope of the fathers that God could raise them from the dead elevates God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the twelve tribes that followed them, from a mere land promise to the promise of eternal life in an eternal and heavenly kingdom. Paul expanded the argument stated here in Gal 3:14-16:

14 He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

15 . . . Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. 16 The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ.

The resurrection of the just and the unjust dominated Paul's defenses, being the main point of the gospel. From Luke's account of Christ's own charge in Acts 24:45-47, the resurrection was central:

45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. 46 He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Paul emphasized the resurrection in Acts 23:6; "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead." In Acts 24:14-15, Paul stated made the resurrection the hope of the prophets: "I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, 15 and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. " The resurrection of the dead was the sticking point with the Jews and the reason they sought to kill Paul in Acts 24:20-21:

Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin— 21 unless it was this one thing I shouted as I stood in their presence: 'It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.'

Paul based his defense on the firm and solid basis of Christ raised from the dead and the hope of the gospel that the righteous will follow: "O king, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me. 8 Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?"

Paul's Early Life as One who Persecuted Christians

Acts 26:9-11

9 "I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. 11 Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.

In Paul's defense before Felix in Acts 22:2-5, he had also summarized his Jewish credentials:

Then Paul said: 3 "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. 4 I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, 5 as also the high priest and all the Council can testify. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

Not only was Paul a Pharisee, but he was also a dedicated persecutor of Christians

Paul's Selection as an Apostle

Acts 26:12-16

12 "On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. 13 About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. 14 We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, '

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

15 "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?'

"'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. 16 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you.

This is the third time Luke has covered the conversion of Paul. The first time was Luke's description of Paul's conversion; the second, Paul's description of his own conversion before Felix; the third, this account by Paul before Agrippa. In each account, the focus is on Christ's calling Paul to be an apostle. In Acts 9:15-16, the Lord told Ananias his purpose for Paul: "15 But the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.'" Acts 22:14-16 recorded the Lord's words, as spoken to Paul:

14 "Then he said: 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. 15 You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'

Paul tells of this experience as the experience from which he was born to be an apostle in 1 Cor 15:7-9:

7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

9 For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

Acts 26:17-18

17 I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them 18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

Here, Paul stated in powerful terms the purpose for which Christ had called him: to open the

eyes of Jews and Gentiles alike; to turn them from darkness to light; to turn them from the power of Satan to God. Darkness to light and Satan to God are polar opposites establishing both domain and power for each. Paul later described the extent and power of Satan's domain, which is often clothed in light to deceive the righteous. In Eph 2:1-2, he wrote: "2 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient." In Eph 6:11-12, Christians are to fight against the evil powers of this dark world and the devil's schemes:

11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

The struggle will be difficult because of the deceitfulness of Satan and his ministers. 2 Cor 11:13-15 teaches:

13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. 15 It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

As Paul fought this battle against the Jews, he knew personally the difficulty of defeating the powers of darkness. However, for Paul and his converts, the Lord provided the way to overcome darkness with light. In Eph 5:8-11, Paul wrote:

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord. 11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.

Even in conversion, Christians, then and now, overcome darkness, according to Col 1:13-14: "13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

Why the Jews Seek Paul's Life

Acts 26:19-23

19 "So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. 20 First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. 21 That is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. 22 But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen – 23 that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles."

In this passage, Paul stated the gospel message to all men, Jews of Jerusalem and Judea and all the Gentiles, in most simple and commanding terms: repent, turn to God, and prove repentance by deeds. That was what Paul preached and that is what we should preach in the 21st century. The gospel foretold by Moses and the prophets was the gospel Paul preached: Christ suffered, died, was the first raised from the dead, and proclaims light to his own people [the Jews] and to the Gentiles. That is why the Jews seized Paul and tried to kill him.

Festus and Agrippa Respond

Acts 26:24-32

24 *At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. "You are out of your mind, Paul!" he shouted. "Your great learning is driving you insane."*

25 *"I am not insane, most excellent Festus," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and reasonable. 26 The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. 27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do."*

28 *Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?"*

29 *Paul replied, "Short time or long – I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains."*

30 *The king rose, and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them. 31 They left the room, and while talking with one another, they said, "This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment."*

32 *Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."*

Festus—a Roman with only a worldly background—immediately rejected Paul’s teaching as that of an insane man. Paul countered that his position was true and reasonable, and turned to Agrippa for confirmation, putting the question straight to him: “King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?” Paul’s conclusion, “I know you dom.” focused on an eternal truth: If one believes the prophets, he must believe in the Christ, resurrected, as the first born from the dead, through whom all men may have the same hope.

Agrippa deferred Paul’s question without answer by saying that Paul could not persuade him in such a short time. Paul’s final plea had nothing to do with his own freedom, but rather, it was a prayer that all men become, as he was, a Christian with hope of the resurrection to eternal life.

Agrippa and Festus concurred in their conclusion that Paul was doing nothing that deserved death or imprisonment. According to Agrippa, Paul could have gone free had he not appealed to Caesar.

In Acts 27, the scene shifts quickly as Paul and his cohorts sail for Italy.

34. Off to Rome at Last: Acts 27

At the conclusion of Act 26, King Agrippa and Festus agreed that Paul had done nothing that deserved death or imprisonment. Agrippa went a step further and said, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

In Acts 27, the scene shifts quickly as Paul and his cohorts sail for Italy, after two years of imprisonment on false charges. However, as the Lord had promised, in Acts 23:11, Paul escaped death and was now heading to Rome: "11 The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."

The Journey to Fair Havens

Acts 27:1-8

27 When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment. 2 We boarded a ship from Adramyttium about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia, and we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us.

3 The next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs. 4 From there we put out to sea again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us. 5 When we had sailed across the open sea off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia. 6 There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board. 7 We made slow headway for many days and had difficulty arriving off Cnidus. When the wind did not allow us to hold our course, we sailed to the lee of Crete, opposite Salmone. 8 We moved along the coast with difficulty and came to a place called Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea.

As Paul and his cohorts left, Luke mentions only himself, by using the 1st person pronoun *we*, and Aristarchus. Aristarchus was a companion to Paul, mentioned first in Acts 19:28-29:

28 When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" 29 Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and rushed as one man into the theater.

He would have been no stranger to the imprisonment and abuse inflicted on Paul. Acts 20:3-4



stated that he was from Thessalonica, "Because the Jews made a plot against him just as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia. 4 He was accompanied . . . , Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, . . ."

Aristarchus evidently remained with Paul during his Roman imprisonment, being called a fellow-prisoner in Col 4:10-11: "10 My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)" Toward the end of Paul's life, he called Aristarchus a fellow worker, but not a fellow prisoner such as Epaphras in Philem 23-24: "23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. 24 And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.

Whether he was fellow worker or fellow prisoner, Aristarchus served side by side with Paul during their most difficult times. He is no small player in the drama unfolding as Paul and his cohorts sail for Rome.

The Roman centurion Julius extends courtesy to Paul allowing him to visit his friends in Sidon. Whether these friends were Christians was unstated, but they did see to his needs.

As they sailed north, they went to the west of Cyprus, where Paul had converted the proconsul and confronted Elymas the sorcerer. This brought them just to the east of Antioch, from which the church at Antioch had sent him forward on his missionary journeys. Before reaching Myra, they sailed just to the south of Tarsus, Paul's home city. One can only imagine the memories that flooded through Paul's mind.

In Myra, the centurion found, and they boarded, an Alexandrian ship headed for Italy. They made slow headway and finally landed at Fair Havens on the southern coast of Crete.

A Storm Rages for Many Days

Acts 27:9-20

9 Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Fast. So Paul warned them, 10 "Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also." 11 But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship. 12 Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there. This was a harbor in Crete, facing both southwest and northwest.

Luke alludes to *the Fast* as the reason that the sailing had become so dangerous. The fast here would be the Day of Atonement (now called Yom Kippur), which occurs in late September or early October. As the season changed to autumn so did the weather. Paul warned them that it would be disastrous to leave, making the voyage dangerous and bringing great loss to the ship, cargo, and their very lives. The centurion took the advice of the pilot and the owner of the ship. Their choice was more compelling since the harbor was not suitable to winter in. They set sail for Phoenix and better harbor.

Acts 27:13-20

13 When a gentle south wind began to blow, they thought they had obtained what they wanted; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. 14 Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the "northeaster," swept down from the island. 15 The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. 16 As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure. 17 When the men had

hoisted it aboard, they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Fearing that they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. 18 We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. 19 On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. 20 When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.

This episode shows the depth of their despair, voiced by Luke in verse 20: "We finally gave up all hope of being saved." So many times, we think we are getting what we want, as they did when "a gentle south wind began to blow." Instead of that gentle wind, they got a storm so violent they lost their cargo and ship's tackle and feared for their very lives. One cannot help but think that we are afloat in the storms of life and in danger of losing everything, even our souls. Charles Albert Tindley voiced this sentiment in his 1906 hymn, *Stand By Me*:

1 When the storms of life are raging,
stand by me (stand by me);
when the storms of life are raging,
stand by me (stand by me).
When the world is tossing me
like a ship upon the sea,
thou who rulest wind and water,
Stand by me (stand by me).

2 In the midst of tribulation,
stand by me (stand by me);
in the midst of tribulation,
stand by me (stand by me).
When the hosts of hell assail,
and my strength begins to fail,
thou who never lost a battle,
stand by me (stand by me).

3 In the midst of faults and failures,
stand by me (stand by me);
in the midst of faults and failures,
stand by me (stand by me).
When I do the best I can,
and my friends misunderstand,
thou who knowest all about me,
stand by me (stand by me).

4 In the midst of persecution,
stand by me (stand by me);
in the midst of persecution,
stand by me (stand by me).
When my foes in battle array
undertake to stop my way,
thou who savèd Paul and Silas,
stand by me (stand by me).

5 When I'm growing old and feeble,
stand by me (stand by me);
when I'm growing old and feeble,
stand by me (stand by me).
When my life becomes a burden,
and I'm nearing chilly Jordan,
O thou "Lily of the Valley,"
stand by me (stand by me).

God Assures Paul That He Will Stand Trial before Caesar

Acts 27:21-26

21 After the men had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. 22 But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. 23 Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me 24 and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' 25 So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. 26 Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island."

At their point of lowest despair, Paul reminded them that he had advised them not to sail from Crete. Their damage and loss stemmed directly from that decision. Now Paul promises them that they will not be lost. However, the ship will be destroyed. Through his angel, God

had assured Paul that he would stand trial before Caesar. God had given Paul their lives, and he charged them to keep courage. Paul held his faith that God would do just what he had promised Paul.

Acts 27:27-32

27 On the fourteenth night we were still being driven across the Adriatic Sea, when about midnight the sailors sensed they were approaching land. 28 They took soundings and found that the water was a hundred and twenty feet deep. A short time later they took soundings again and found it was ninety feet deep. 29 Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight. 30 In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow. 31 Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved." 32 So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it fall away.

During this episode, while they are approaching land, some of the sailors, ignoring God's word sought to escape in the lifeboat. Paul warned the centurion and the soldiers that they would be lost if these men left the ship. For those on the ship to reach safety, they all had to do what God commanded through Paul. The soldiers cut the ropes holding the lifeboat and let it fall away.

Everyone Reached Dry Land in Safety

Acts 27:33-38

33 Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. "For the last fourteen days," he said, "you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food – you haven't eaten anything. 34 Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head." 35 After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. 36 They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. 37 Altogether there were 276 of us on board. 38 When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea.

By this time, they are all doing what Paul told them to do. Paul told them to eat food in order to survive and promised them that not one would lose a single hair from his head. No matter the trial and no matter the eminent danger, Paul gave thanks to God for the food. Evidently, they now believed Paul's word received from God and took food and were encouraged. Luke gives the number of people on the ship as 276, a large number, and not one would be lost.

Acts 27:39-44

39 When daylight came, they did not recognize the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could. 40 Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach. 41 But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf.

42 The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. 43 But the centurion wanted to spare Paul's life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. 44 The rest were to get there on planks or on pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land in safety.

Acts 17 ends with everyone reaching land in safety, just as Paul had promised. Their final success was, in no small, way due to the intervention of the centurion who kept the soldiers

from killing the prisoners, including Paul, whose life he wanted to spare. Yet it was the power and certainty of God's word that saved all these people, fulfilling the will of the Lord that the apostle would appear and testify before Caesar. The same power that allowed Paul to escape the threat of death at the hands of Jews now saved him from this terrible storm, and that power will save us from the storms of this life.

One can only imagine this ordeal in Paul's life. However, there were certainly many more. In 2 Cor 11:21-29, written during Paul's third missionary journey, several years before this ship wreck, Paul cataloged his persecutions up until that time:

What anyone else dares to boast about – I am speaking as a fool – I also dare to boast about. 22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. 23 Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. 24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, **three times I was shipwrecked**, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. 27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. 28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

35. Paul in Rome: Acts 28

Acts 27 ended with everyone reaching land in safety, just as Paul had promised. The centurion had kept the soldiers from killing the prisoners, including Paul, whose life he wanted to spare. Yet, it was the power and certainty of God's word that saved all the people, fulfilling the will of the Lord that the apostle would appear and testify before Caesar. The same power that allowed Paul to escape the threat of death at the hands of Jews now saved him from this terrible storm, and that power will save us from the storms of this life.

The threats of storm and sea passed, but dangers remained on the island of Malta located south of Sicily

A Viper Attaches Itself to Paul's Hand

Acts 28:1-6

1 Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. 2 The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. 3 Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. 4 When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, "This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live." 5 But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. 6 The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead, but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.

The people of Malta greeted Paul and his cohorts with unusual kindness. The cold and raining weather were not so accommodating. When a snake fastened itself to Paul's hand, the islanders took it as sign that Justice had spoken against him. However, when Paul showed no ill effects from the snakebite, they changed their minds and said that he was god. The purpose of miracles such as this and subsequent ones on Malta was, as miracles in Acts always were, to confirm the word that Paul spoke as the word of God. As noted before, the Lord promised his apostles certain miraculous abilities in Mark 16:17-18, one of which was that snakes picked up would not hurt them:

17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

In the same context, Mark 16:19-20, Mark recorded that the disciples used these gifts to confirm the word of the Lord:

19 After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. 20 Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.

Heb 2:3-4 also teaches that the miracles confirmed the word:

how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. 4 God also



testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

The fact that the islanders looked upon Paul as a god, before they heard the word of God that he would preach, showed the power of the miracles to confirm the speaker as one speaking the word of God. That the islanders thought Paul a god shows that they recognized his power as power from God almighty, though misdirected to Paul. This had happened to Peter prior to the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10:25-26 where Luke had recorded, "25 As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. 26 But Peter made him get up. 'Stand up,' he said, 'I am only a man myself.'" Even angels could not be worshipped as God, according to the situation in which John found himself in Rev 22:8-9:

8 I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. 9 But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"

Modern day clerics and their worshippers who bow down to them should take these lessons from the apostles and angels to learn the principle laid down by the Lord Jesus in Matt 23:9-12

9 And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. 10 Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ. 11 The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

Paul Heals the Sick of the Island

Acts 28:7-10

7 There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and for three days entertained us hospitably. 8 His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. 9 When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. 10 They honored us in many ways and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed.

Paul's reception by the local official, Publius, was cordial and hospitable. The people of the island honored Paul and his companions and furnished them with needed supplies. The curing of the sick of the island was to confirm the word, as described above, and in no way was a mere accommodation.

Paul Arrives in Rome

Acts 28:11-16

11 After three months we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island. It was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux. 12 We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days. 13 From there we set sail and arrived at Rhegium. The next day the south wind came up, and on the following day we reached Puteoli. 14 There we found some brothers who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. 15 The brothers there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged. 16 When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him.

Paul and his companions stayed during the winter for three months. The storm that brought them here had been most likely a seasonal storm of the fall. Then they sailed, stopping at

cities of Sicily and Italy, to Rome, finding brothers at Puteoli, where they stayed a week. The brothers at Rome had heard that Paul was coming and came out to meet them at Forum of Appius, known as the market of Appius, a town about 40 miles south of Rome. Paul was encouraged by the sight of these men.

In Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself with only a soldier to guard him.

Paul Presents Himself to the Leaders of the Jews

Acts 28:17-20

17 Three days later he called together the leaders of the Jews. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: "My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. 18 They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. 19 But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar – not that I had any charge to bring against my own people. 20 For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain."

As was Paul's custom in new towns, he went first to the Jews. When they arrived Paul rehearsed the events that had brought him to Rome, including his imprisonment, trials, and appeal to Caesar. Paul was bound with a chain even though he was allowed to live alone. When he states, "It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain," one knows from Paul's past experience that the Jews will reject his teaching of Christ risen from the dead as the first fruits of all who follow.

Acts 28:21-22

21 They replied, "We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of the brothers who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. 22 But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect."

The Jewish leaders had not received bad reports from Jerusalem about Paul, but they did know that all men everywhere were talking against this sect. Therefore, they wanted to hear more.

The Jews Disagree about Paul's Final Statement

Acts 23:23-28

23 They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. 24 Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. 25 They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet:

26 "'Go to this people and say,

"You will be ever hearing but never understanding;

you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

" 27 For this people's heart has become calloused;

they hardly hear with their ears,

and they have closed their eyes.

*Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts
and turn, and I would heal them.'*

28 "Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!"

Paul used the law of Moses and the prophets and tried to convince them about the kingdom of God and Jesus. After he quoted Isaiah, he said that God's salvation would go to the Gentiles who would listen. The Jews left (See the footnote on verse 29).

Peter and Paul Spend their Final Days Teaching and Writing

Acts 28:30-31

30 For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. 31 Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Last Days of Paul

Secular traditions are the only source for finding out what might have happened to Paul in the very end, for the scriptures are silent. However, in his letters from Rome, he wrote of his wants, need, and attitudes, as he waited for the end.

The tradition has it that Paul, as a Roman citizen, was beheaded on the Ostian Road just outside of Rome. Nero died June, 68 A.D., so that Paul was executed before that date, perhaps in the late spring of that year (or 67). Perhaps Luke and Timothy were with him. [Notes taken from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright © 1996, 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.]

In 2 Tim 4:11-13, Paul told who was with him and asks for his cloak and scrolls:

11 Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. 12 I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. 13 When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments.

In 2 Tim 4:21, he hurried Timothy to get there before winter (perhaps, he really needed that cloak): "21 Do your best to get here before winter. Eubulus greets you, and so do Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all the brothers."

At the beginning of the letter to Timothy in 2 Tim 1:15-18, Paul's reflection has a hint of melancholy as he talks of those who have deserted him:

15 You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes.

16 May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. 17 On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me. 18 May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus.

Finally, at the end of his life on earth in 2 Tim 4:6-8, Paul speaks of the time of his departure:

6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

The Last Days of Peter

Peter's last days find few mentions after the conference in Acts 15. With no evidence, the tradition is that he died a martyr at Rome about 67 A.D., when about 75 years old. The Lord had predicted a violent death for him (John 21:18-19), which it is thought to have come to pass by crucifixion under Nero. It is said that at his own desire he was crucified head downward, feeling himself unworthy to resemble his Master in his death. Paul said Peter was in Antioch while the circumcision controversy was going on in Gal 2:11-13: "11 When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face . . ." (Ibid).

Peter spoke of his putting aside "the tent of this body" in 2 Peter 1:12-15:

12 So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. 13 I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, 14 because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.

Although there is no evidence of his crucifixion in Rome, there is a prophecy by Christ that he would die a martyr's death in John 21:17-19

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. 18 I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." 19 Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.

The Last Days of James, John, and Luke

Jesus prophesied that both James and John would die a martyr's death, perhaps even by crucifixion, since Jesus describes it as "the cup I drink" in Mark 10:39-40:

Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, 40 but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

John was with Peter during the opening scenes of Acts. He was also with Peter when Peter healed the crippled man (Acts 3:1 ff) and when Peter went up to Samaria after Philip's success in preaching (Acts 8:14 ff). John was with Peter and James, the Lord's brother, with Paul in Gal 2. This showed that John survived his own brother James, whose death Luke recorded in Acts 12. According to the tradition universally accepted in the church, John survived till the time of Trajan (98 A.D.). (Ibid).

Luke chronicled James death, making it the death of an apostle of which we can be certain. The account by Luke is in Acts 12:1-3:

1 It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. 2 He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. 3 When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also.

Thus ended the Acts of the Apostles, as recorded by Luke the physician, Paul's dear friend in Col 4:14-15: "14 Our dear friend Luke, the doctor . . ." He alone was with Paul in 2 Tim 4:11:

"11 Only Luke is with me." In Philem 24, he is a fellow worker: "24 And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers." The extensive use of the 1st person plural *we* in the last chapters of Acts indicates that Luke probably spent his later years with Paul.