

The New Testament, Book 5

The Acts of the Apostles

The book of The Acts of the Apostles is the story of the founding and growth of the Church in the 1st Century AD. More precisely, it is the history of the Church during its first 30 years, covering the period from approximately 30 to 60 AD. In this book, usually referred to simply as “Acts,” we will see the birth of the Church in Jerusalem and its rapid expansion, northward through Samaria and Galilee to Syria, thence westward through Asia Minor and Greece to Rome, spreading over what may be thought of as the heart of the Roman Empire.

From there, the apostolic Church further spread outward into the lands of what were then called “the barbarians” on the frontiers of the known World. To study that latter history one would have to go to the Ante-Nicene Fathers, Eusebius, and other ancient histories, for Acts will leave us in Rome with Paul, accompanied by Luke the beloved physician.

The Book of Acts is a vastly expanded version of the story summarized in the crystalline abridgement of Mark 16:20. In the three decades of the early-to- mid-1st Century covered by this book, the glorious good news of salvation spread like a grass fire, from its amazing beginning in an upper room in Jerusalem, throughout the known World. The gospel was not spread by the sword, nor by clever promotion, nor by lofty argument, nor by demagogues manipulating the masses. No, the Church spread and grew as the simple good news of redemption was told by those whose lives had been transformed by it, and as it was confirmed by the power of the Holy Spirit, exactly as summarized in those 20 words of that 20th verse of Mark 16 (q.v.).

This book opens with the resurrected Jesus, having his last earthly conversation with his closest disciples, and giving them his final commandment. This opening scene is a more complete account of the same, but abbreviated, account found in Luke 24:49-51. In fact, since Luke was also the human author of Acts, the two books could be thought of as one work, with Luke’s gospel as Part I and Acts as Part II; this is made clear in the salutations of the two books and confirmed by other ancient writings, as we are about to see under “**Author.**”

Luke's brilliant history of the birth and beginnings of the Church closes at the end of Paul's first imprisonment (house arrest) in Rome, teaching and ministering to a steady stream of visitors, and writing pastoral letters to the churches he has founded, prior to his martyrdom during the persecution of Christians under the emperor Nero.

The Use of “Christ” and “Jesus” in Acts, the Epistles, and Revelation.

In the gospels the Lord is often referred to simply as “Jesus” (his given name), and less often as “Christ” (his title). This is because the Subject of the gospels is Jesus, the man, the Messiah who becomes the risen Christ.

Beginning here in Acts, however, and continuing through the rest of the New Testament, we are dealing with the risen, glorified Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Son, who sits at the right hand of the Father in Heaven. Thus, we should not be surprised that, beginning here, we will find Him more often referred to as “Christ,” as “Jesus Christ,” or as “Christ Jesus,” rather than simply as “Jesus.”

A. Author. Although he doesn’t identify himself by name in either book, Luke is almost certainly the author of both the gospel that bears his name and Acts. The obvious continuity of the salutations of Luke's Gospel and Acts argues for this, as do the numerous “we”/“us” passages in Acts, in which he includes himself in the events described¹.

Since earliest times Luke, whom Paul called “the beloved physician,” has been recognized as the author of both. Dionysius, Bishop of Rome (ca 260 AD) quotes from Acts 1:1 and attributes it to Luke². An ancient Syriac document in the British Museum dated ca 275 AD, in which the author identifies himself as “Addaeus the apostle,” says, “Luke, moreover, the evangelist had such diligence that he wrote the exploits of the Acts of the Apostles, and the ordinances and laws of the ministry of their priesthood, and whither each one of them went. By his diligence, I say, did Luke write these things, and more than these; and he placed them in the hand of Priscilla and Aquila, his disciples, and they accompanied him up to the day of his death³.” Eusebius (ca 250-300 AD), early Church historian, declared this document to be authentic.

According to Eusebius, Luke was a native of Antioch, the location of the church that sent out Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13). He was probably a convert of Paul; he traveled and ministered with him, and was with Paul at the time of his execution. Luke was probably a gentile and, if so, he is the only gentile writer of any part of the Bible. For more information concerning Luke, see the introductory material in the study guide to Luke’s gospel.

B. Place and Date. The salutations of Luke’s gospel and Acts, as well as the subject matter, tell us that Acts was written after Luke's gospel. Acts was written

¹ The “we”/“us” passages can be found in Chaps. 16, 20, 21, 27 & 28.

² ANF, Vol 7, Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, Book II, Sect II, vi, p 398.

³ ANF Vol 8, Book VII, Ancient Syriac Documents, The Teaching of the Apostles, x, p 672. We shall meet Aquila and Priscilla in Chapt. 18.

about 55 AD, and before Paul's execution⁴. Had it been written after Paul's execution, that event would surely have been included in the book, as are the executions of Stephen, the first martyr, and James, son of Zebedee and the brother of John the Beloved, one of the Lord's inner circle. The place of writing is unknown.

***NOTE:** There is some reason to speculate that Theophilus may have been Paul's advocate at his first trial before Nero, and that Luke and Acts were sent to him to acquaint him with the facts of Paul's beliefs and activities. Things giving plausibility to this speculation are Luke's addressing Theophilus as "most excellent," and the terms "evidence," "infallible proofs" and "setting things in order." This is interesting conjecture, but still conjecture, however; and we know from Acts that Paul was not at all reticent or unskillful when it came to defending himself, beginning with his rescue from the murderous mob at the Temple (Acts 21-23), and he had plenty of practice during his years of imprisonment in Caesarea before he finally appealed to Caesar (Acts 24 and 25).*

C. Occasion. Luke, a careful and diligent historian, desired that the history of the birth and early years of the Church be carefully and fully recorded, in the same way that he had researched and written his gospel account.

D. Theme. This book might well be called "The Acts of the Holy Spirit," for throughout the book the principal character is the Holy Spirit, Whom Jesus had promised, and for Whom He had commanded the disciples to wait ("...tarry ye in Jerusalem...")⁵. It is the Holy Spirit Whom they received in power at Pentecost, and it was He Who guided and empowered everything that the early Christians accomplished. Throughout the book, the emphasis is on the person and work of the Holy Spirit, Who would be (and still is) the abiding presence of God on Earth during the Church Age.

Acts is a book of miracles. There are so many miracles recorded in Acts that Dr. H.H. Halley has observed, "Take the miracles out of the Book of Acts and there is very little left⁶."

E. Highlights. Highlights of Acts include the following:

1. Luke's Opening Salutation. (1:1-3)

The author (almost certainly Luke) again addresses Theophilus, as he did in the salutation of Luke's gospel, and refers to the record previously given to him of all things that Jesus "began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken

⁴ See "New Testament Fragments in the Dead Sea Scrolls!" in the Study Guide, Introduction to the New Testament; for much more information on these fragments see also the same title in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

⁵ Luke 24:49.

⁶ Halley's statement reminds me of a similar, but not a positive, one by Mark Twain, in commenting on the Book of Mormon: "Take 'and it came to pass' out of the Book of Mormon and there is very little left."

up.” After this, he tells Theophilus, Jesus gave commandments to his apostles “through the Holy Ghost.”

To complete the salutation, Luke tells him that after his death and resurrection Jesus appeared to his disciples for 40 days, “with many infallible truths,” continuing to teach them until the moment when He was taken up into Heaven.

NOTE: Referring to the salutation, Dionysius (ca 260 AD), who is mentioned above, wrote, “...for our Lord and Teacher Jesus Christ, the Son of God, began first to do and then to teach, as Luke somewhere says, ‘which Jesus began to do and to teach’.”

2. A Final Commandment. (1:4-5)

The action in the Book of Acts begins with Jesus and his 11 closest disciples on the Mount of Olives, the hill northeast of Jerusalem where He had often gone with them, and the place where He had been betrayed by Judas and arrested. Here, He gives them their final commandment: that they should wait in Jerusalem for what He calls “the promise of the Father.” Reminding them of the baptism of John the Baptist, in water, He tells them that they will soon be baptized, not in water, but in (or with) the Holy Ghost “not many days hence⁷.”

3. Jesus is Interrupted. (1:6-7)

Jesus is trying to give his disciples their final instructions, yet they are not following Him at all. They interrupt Him with an irrelevant question, asking Him when He will come back, defeat the Romans, and “restore the kingdom to Israel.”

Overlooking their total misunderstanding of the meaning and purpose of his return in the Second Advent, He patiently tells them that the time of his return is not for them to know, and that it is known only by the Father. And then He gets back to what He was trying to tell them before He was interrupted.

NOTE: We see here that these 11 hand-picked apostles still do not fully understand the purpose and role of their Master as the awaited Messiah.

The Pharisees were not looking for the coming of a suffering Messiah, one who would die as the sacrificed Lamb of God to pay the sin debt for all of mankind. Instead they were awaiting the coming of a Messiah who would be a military hero like David, one who would lead the Israelites to victory over the hated Romans and establish an earthly kingdom of the Jews.

Today it seems that, if they read only Psalm 22, those learned students of the Scriptures would have realized that the true Messiah would die for their sins in substitutionary atonement. But the Pharisees were, as Jesus had told them,

⁷ The waiting period will be 10 days, and this baptism will occur at Pentecost.

*blinded by following the traditions of men, which made "the Word of God of none effect".*⁸

It seems clear here that the 11 apostles were still failing to understand this fundamental and vital concept, probably due to the widespread but mistaken teachings of the Pharisees; but they will understand after Pentecost.

4. The Promised Baptism in (or with) the Holy Ghost. (1:8)

Back on the subject, Jesus tells the disciples that, when they receive this baptism with (or in) the Holy Spirit, they will receive power. As a result of the infilling with the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus tells them, they will be witnesses for Him--beginning in Jerusalem, and spreading outward into all of Judea, to Samaria, and even into the farthest parts of the Earth⁹.

NOTE: *The Greek word here rendered "power" is "dunamis." It is one of several Greek words rendered "power" in the New Testament, but the others can also mean authority, ability, or the reign of a sovereign.*

*"Dunamis" is the word from which we get English words like "dynamic," "dynamo," and "dynamite"; it is the power to move things, change things and function in a mighty way. Remember that, in the Introduction to the NT, we saw that when we transliterate (borrow a word) from Greek and adopt it into the English language) the Greek letter "upsilon" (the "u" sound in dunamis) becomes a "y." Thus, in English, "dunamis" becomes "dynamis." Yes, when this word is used it means real power. As a result of receiving this Heaven-sent power, the disciples will be more effective as witnesses for the Lord*¹⁰.

5. The Ascension. (1:9-12)

Immediately after Jesus speaks these last words of instruction, He is taken up into the air above them, and He disappears into a cloud. As they stand there, apparently wordless, amazed and transfixed, staring up at the cloud, two angels appear, dressed in white garments¹¹. The angels ask the disciples why they are standing there, gawking, looking up at the sky (surely, it is a rhetorical question). And then they make a simple statement that has enormous significance for the Church: they tell the disciples that, when Jesus returns to Earth, He will return in the same manner in which He ascended--i.e. He will descend from the sky. The angels then apparently vanish (there is no more mention of them), and the disciples, surely with their heads spinning, walk back to Jerusalem to begin their

⁸ Matthew 15:6; Mk 7:13.

⁹ The Greek word rendered "witnesses" here has great significance. It is the plural of *martus* from which we derive the English word "martyr," meaning that such witnesses will bear witness to the truth of the Word of God unto their death, or will bear witness by dying for this truth.

¹⁰ See in this regard Acts 1:4 and Lk 24:49, and note the phrase, "the promise of the [my] Father," in both.

¹¹ It was never dull for those men, living with Jesus! And, if we are rightly related to Him, and are walking in the Spirit, the same should be true of us.

lives without the constant physical presence of Jesus. From the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem, Luke tells us, is “a Sabbath day’s journey” (about ½ mile).

NOTES:

a. We may wonder whether or not the two angels who appeared here, to explain the situation to the gathered disciples, were the same two who appeared at the empty tomb of Jesus with a similar message for Mary Magdalene and the other disciples. It is interesting to speculate, and I am inclined to think that they were; but the fact is that we are left to wonder, and to be in awe of the creative mind of our wonderful Heavenly Father.

b. The actual distance of “a Sabbath day’s journey” is a bit complex. It is thought to have had its origin in the commandment, “Let no man go out of his place on the seventh day” (Exodus 16:29), meaning that all should stay at home, in or around their tents, on the Sabbath, resting and reflecting on the things of God.

During the Exodus this was a simple matter, for the Jewish nation was together, organized, with all doing the same things at the same time. After the settlement in Canaan, however, the new situation of dispersion created complications. For example, what if one is still traveling when overtaken at sundown by the beginning of a Sabbath day--what does he do? He can’t stay “in his own place,” for he isn’t in his own place.

To accommodate for the new, dispersed situation, rules began to be established by the religious leaders, and a Sabbath day’s journey became the distance one could travel from his home on a Sabbath or, if on a journey, how much farther he could travel once a Sabbath began. That distance was established at 2,000 cubits (about ½ mile).

Legalists, however, couldn’t keep the matter that simple, so amendments were added; for example, one could travel the legal distance, then “buy” temporarily a plot of ground (or deposit food for two meals) at the end of the legal distance. Then he could declare that spot his home, and then travel the legal limit farther, doubling the distance he could travel.

For our purposes, we shall keep it as simple as possible and consider a Sabbath day’s journey to be ½ mile.

6. A Replacement for Judas. (1:13-26)

Back in Jerusalem, the disciples go to an upper room which they have apparently rented (probably the same one where they and the Lord enjoyed their last Passover meal and, after the resurrection, where Jesus twice appeared to the disciples).

There, the eleven surviving apostles are living, plus Mary, the other women and

the brothers of Jesus, for a total of about 120 people; it must have been a very large room¹²!

In the following days Peter stands up and states that a replacement should be chosen for Judas. He quotes from Ps 69:25 concerning the status of Judas, and Ps 109:8 concerning the necessity for choosing a replacement. It is decided that this replacement must be one of the disciples who was with Jesus from his baptism by John the Baptist through the resurrection. Two qualified candidates are chosen, and the disciples pray for guidance; they then cast lots and Matthias is chosen as the 13th disciple.

NOTES:

a. Matthias is never again mentioned in Scripture. He is, however, quoted in "Constitutions of the Holy Apostles," a compilation of apostolic teachings from the 1st to the 4th Centuries AD, giving instructions concerning the liturgical use of oil and water in the Church¹³. He also appears elsewhere in the Ante-Nicene Fathers, but those traditions are not considered by most scholars to be historic.

b. One tradition concerning Matthias, which cannot be authenticated but is probably valid, is that he had been one of the "other 70" disciples sent out by Jesus, two-by-two to preach, heal and deliver (Lk 10:1f). Concerning his ministry and death there are two traditions: (1) that he went to Ethiopia and preached among the "barbarians and man-eaters" where he was martyred and buried. And, (2) that he was stoned and beheaded in Jerusalem. Only God knows his true history after being selected.

c. Verses 18 and 19 require some explanation.

(1) Who bought the field? As Peter presents his case for selecting a replacement for Judas, he states in v 18 that Judas "purchased a field" with the money he was given for betraying Jesus. Judas did not literally buy the field, for he had returned the "blood money" to the Pharisees and then hanged himself, apparently without delay¹⁴. This simply means that, since the religious leaders decided to use the money to buy an un-sanctified field for the burial of foreigners, it was, in the sense that they bought it with money belonging to Judas, that Judas "purchased" the field. Similarly, a common expression among servicemen in World War II and the Korean War (and, to a lesser degree, in Vietnam) when a man was killed was, "He bought the farm." This meant that, since so many then

¹² It appears that, during the 40 days during which the resurrected Jesus appeared periodically to his followers, his brothers have become believers. Nothing is said about his sisters but, surely, the same is true of them. Also, the Greek word rendered "upper room" here is *huperoon*, meaning an upper chamber or apartment--not just one room.

¹³ ANF, Vol 7, Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, Book VIII, Sect IV, xxix, p 494.

¹⁴ Matthew 27:3-5. Only Matthew tells us of the suicide of Judas.

were farm boys, the \$10,000, paid to his family as a result of his death, could be used to pay off the mortgage on the family farm.

(2) Does Peter in v 18 contradict Matt 27:5? Peter also says in v 18 that Judas fell “headlong” into the field and that his torso burst and his entrails “gushed out.” How could this be, since Matthew wrote that, after returning the money to the religious leaders Judas “went [out] and hanged himself” (Matt 27:5)? This one is more difficult (as testified to by the great variety of explanations by commentators), so what can we make of it?

Judas apparently hanged himself on that very night in which he returned the 30 pieces of silver. Consider the fact that no Jew would have touched a corpse during the week-long celebration of Passover (thus becoming ceremonially unclean) and, at the end of the feast, no one would want to handle a corpse which has been decomposing for a week (or even get downwind of it, because of the awful stench), it seems pretty obvious that Judas’ corpse probably hung there until someone cut the rope or, in advanced decomposition, the head separated from the rest of the body which fell, breaking open upon impact with the ground¹⁵. Peter, reflecting on the death of Judas about two months later, would have a more vivid image in his mind of the fall from the tree and bursting of the abdominal cavity, than of the freshly dead--but otherwise normal--Judas, hanging from a tree limb which, in the excitement, heartache and confusion of the following week, he probably never even saw¹⁶.

The word “headlong” in v 18 presents a problem for this explanation, for it suggests to most “head down”; and even turning to the Greek leaves questions unanswered, for the word is “*prenes*” which can either mean “headlong” or “in a prone position”; and some authorities give it the additional meaning of “swollen or distended¹⁷.” The English word “headlong” is found in only two places in the NT: here, and in Lk 4:29, where the friends and neighbors of Jesus from the Synagogue in Nazareth attempt to throw him off a cliff to kill Him. There, in Lk 4:29, the English is rendered from a different Greek word, “*katakremizo*,” which Vine translates as “to throw over a precipice.” Neither the Greek for “headlong” in Lk 4:29, nor in v 18 here, includes the meaning of a vertical fall with the head down. Even in English we use the word to mean rushing into something directly,

¹⁵ The head is not connected, directly, to the rest of the skeleton; it is held in place only by connective tissue and muscle.

¹⁶ In the ancient East (and in other parts of the World) it was customary to hang the body of a convicted criminal (or a defeated enemy) in a public place and leave it until, in advanced decomposition, it fell apart. See the study guide to Esther, Chapt 5, explanatory **NOTE** following.

¹⁷ Unlike the Greek language in general, which has the advantage of being much more precise than either Hebrew or English, here there is an exception; *prenes* can have these several meanings. Judging from the way they handled the word, even the venerable Dr. James Strong, and W.E. Vine were bewildered by it.

or precipitously, moving straight ahead (literally or figuratively)--not diving with the body vertical and the head down.

Finally, I would not presume to place my reasoning above, or even equal to, the many linguistically accomplished scholars who have attempted to explain this. But this makes sense to me, and it is the best that I can do.

7. The Arrival of the Promised Holy Spirit. (2:1-4)

It is Pentecost, a feast day observed 50 days after Passover. The 120 disciples are gathered “with one accord in one place,” when suddenly there is a sound from Heaven like a mighty rushing wind, and this sound fills the place where they are sitting. At the same time there is the appearance of divided tongues of flame, sitting on each of them. They are all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they all begin to “speak with [unknown] tongues,” as the Spirit inspires them and gives them the ability. They are all speaking in various languages which are spoken in other parts of the World, but in languages that are unknown to them. This is an amazing, miraculous event!

NOTES:

a. “Pentecost” is Greek for “fiftieth [day].” It is celebrated on the 50th day after Passover. It is also called “Feast of Weeks,” not because it lasts for a number of weeks, but because God commanded that seven weeks (49 days) should pass after Passover, and the next day (“the morrow after the Sabbath”) the feast should be celebrated. Thus, 49 days plus “the morrow” make 50 days. Pentecost also celebrates the grain harvest; and, in Hebrew tradition, the giving of the Torah to Moses on Sinai.

b. Why would God have had the disciples wait until Pentecost to perform this miracle? I will not presume to interpret God's reasoning; but, in a human sense, the timing was perfect. There were hundreds of thousands of Jews from all parts of the known World in Jerusalem for the feast, and the new Christians would take the gospel with them when they returned to their homes.

c. Where did this occur? The traditional Christian belief is that, when they were baptized with (or in) the Holy Spirit, they were in the same upper room where they had celebrated the Passover with Jesus, where He had twice appeared after the resurrection, and where they had been living, off and on, since then.

Today tourists in Israel are taken to such an upper room in Jerusalem and told that it is the place where all these things occurred. Tour group leaders, including sincere Christian leaders who, believing this, take their groups into the room (“This is the very room where...”) and lead rapturous praise and worship in that “sacred” room.

All evidence suggests that they are mistaken; here is why:

*To begin, that building dates to the 12th Century--to Crusader times. First Century ground level is 20-30 feet below the current pavement. Additionally, Pentecost was one of three major feasts in the Jewish year and, in each of them, all men who could get there were required to worship in the Temple¹⁸. If the rest were left behind in an upper room to receive the Holy Spirit, the group would have consisted only of women, children, very old men, and cripples (and I doubt that there were any cripples in **that** group).*

All the passage tells us is that they were in “the house where they were sitting.” Realistically, only God knows where they were; but it is very likely that they were in a part of the outer court of the Temple, which contained a number of “porches” (porticos--roofed platforms) where people gathered to worship. It was in these open-air porches that Jesus did much--if not most--of his teaching in Jerusalem. Since the miracle of the disciples’ speaking in tongues immediately drew a crowd which heard every word they were saying, and which quickly grew to include at least 3,000 people (probably all men), it is likely that the infilling with its attendant miracles occurred in the Temple, in one of the porches in the Court of the Congregation, surrounded by a multitude of other worshippers.

8. The Miracle of Unknown Tongues Draws a Crowd. (2:5-13)

As the 120 disciples speak in languages that they have never learned or spoken, those around them are astonished (as are, probably, the disciples doing the supernatural speaking)! As word of this phenomenon spreads (is “noised abroad”), a growing crowd forms around the disciples. Those hearing them are all devout Jews; and most, if not all, understand and speak Hebrew and Aramaic. Among them, however, are many who have lived in every country in the known World, but now live in Jerusalem. Others, no doubt, who live in foreign countries, have come to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost. These multilingual Jews recognize, from the Aramaic or Hebrew accents of the disciples (when they were speaking naturally--not supernaturally), that the disciples are Galilaeans; and they marvel that they hear them speaking, “in our own tongue wherein we were born,” at least 16 foreign languages¹⁹! They want to know how this can be. Some, who speak and understand only Hebrew or Aramaic (or are not listening carefully) mock the disciples, and think that they are babbling because they are drunk.

NOTE: *Many, who believe that miracles no longer occur, and who are especially uncomfortable with, or scornful of, the miracle of tongues, teach that this baptism of which John the Baptist spoke, with (or in) the Holy Spirit, was only for the*

¹⁸ The three major feasts of Judaism are Passover, Pentecost (Feast of Weeks) and Tabernacles.

¹⁹ It is interesting to compare this list of foreign regions with those addressed by Peter in I Peter 1:1. From Jerusalem at Pentecost, these Spirit-filled believers had scattered all over the known world, taking with them the good news of redemption.

apostles (the surviving original 11 plus Matthias), that the miracle of tongues was given to them so that they could preach the gospel to the crowd gathered for Pentecost, and that it never occurred again. However, consider the following:

a. Those around them were all “devout Jews,” who understood Hebrew and Aramaic well enough to recognize the Galilean accent of the disciples when they were speaking Aramaic or Hebrew²⁰. When praising and glorifying God in languages which they had never learned, the disciples would not have spoken those unknown languages with Galilean accents, because all acts of the Holy Spirit are perfect.

We cannot base a belief on testimonies of others; however, I can say with absolute certainty that I have heard others praying and praising God in languages unknown to them, but in languages of which I had sufficient knowledge to recognize and understand what was said, and in those occurrences the accenting of the languages was perfect. In fact, in a praise meeting in Haiti I listened as a young Haitian preacher worshipped and glorified God in perfect, unaccented English. It was beautiful--like Scripture; and it was probably the only time in my life that I have ever heard English spoken with no accent of any kind. At the end of the service I asked the young Haitian where he learned English, but he only looked at me, confused and embarrassed. Most Haitians understand French, so I asked him in French if he spoke English, and he replied in French, "Certainly not." To be certain of what I had heard I asked the young man's pastor if the young man spoke English, and the pastor looked startled and said, "Him? Oh no--he has never been to school in his life." I have forgotten many things in the years that followed; but I have never forgotten that night in Haiti.

*b. The disciples were **not** preaching the gospel. They were praising and glorifying God (v 11), i.e. speaking, “in our tongues **the wonderful works of God** (emphasis mine)²¹.” Peter will preach and proclaim the gospel next, after the crowd gathers, and he probably preached it in Aramaic.*

c. As we shall see, there were subsequent infillings with the Holy Spirit for these same disciples;

d. We shall also see that there were other Christians called “apostles” in the New Testament, e.g. Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:14);

e. And we shall see that other groups of new believers spoke and prayed in tongues as the Church spread throughout the known World, e.g. Acts 10:44-47; Acts 19:1-6; I Cor 12-14.

9. A New, Dynamic, Peter Begins to Preach. (2:14-21)

²⁰ Judas Iscariot was the only one of the original 12 apostles who was not from Galilee; and he is now dead.

²¹ Concerning this supernatural praise and worship see Zephaniah 3:9.

A new, dynamic Peter stands up, backed by the other 11 apostles, and begins to preach. Addressing “Ye men of Judaea and all that dwell at Jerusalem,” he tells the crowd that the disciples are not drunk, as some are saying, for it is only “the third hour of the day” (9 O’clock in the morning); by implication he is saying that no one is drunk this early in the day. Rather, he says, what the crowd has just seen and heard is the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecies, which he then proceeds to quote at length²².

NOTES:

a. When Peter stands up to address the gathered crowd, he addresses them as "Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem..."; but the literal translation of the Greek here is "Men, Jews, and all ye who inhabit Jerusalem...". The Greek word rendered in the AV (KJV) as "men of Judaea" is "Ioudaioi." It can be rendered "men of Judaea", as we see it here; but the same Greek word is rendered as "Jews" 193 times in the NT, and as "Jewess" (female Jew) twice. Addressing the crowd as "Jews...", as in the literal Greek, instead of "men of Judaea," is more inclusive, and lends support for the Lord's purpose in having the disciples wait until Pentecost to receive the infilling with the Holy Spirit; for then Jews from all over the known World would be gathered in Jerusalem for the feast.

b. The New Peter. How do we explain this new, bold and dynamic Peter? After all, he is facing a crowd that includes many, if not most, of the people who had demanded the crucifixion of Jesus. The crowd probably includes also some of the same people before whom, only 50 days earlier, overcome with fear, he had denied Jesus, with swearing and cursing, in order to save himself. The explanation for this “new Peter” is to be found in the promise that Jesus had made in Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:8: it is that Peter has now been “endued with power from on high,” and he is now preaching in that promised power of the Holy Spirit for which Jesus had commanded the disciples to wait.

c. An Overlooked Miracle. There was apparently another miracle at Pentecost; and yet it is a thing that I have never seen mentioned by other commentators. It did not even occur to the great Matthew Henry, who failed to notice this miracle; and his commentary on this event is so exhaustive and detailed that many motivated students of the Word are exhausted by it.

This miracle lies in the fact that Peter, in his first outing as a preacher, could quote an entire, long, passage from Joel, and then (as we shall see in Highlight 10 below) go on to quote from Psalms 16 and 110. He was an uneducated fisherman who had never studied the Hebrew prophets; in fact, it is highly likely that he could

²² Joel 2:28-32.

not even read²³. And, although it is possible that at some time he had heard these passages of Scripture read by the rabbis in the synagogue, or quoted by Jesus during the past three years, there is no record of it. None. This quoting by Peter, of the prophecies of Joel and the Psalms, appears to have been a miracle--and one overlooked by the commentators.

d. Does This Baptism Make One Perfect? Did receiving this baptism with the Holy Spirit make Peter perfect? No. He was still very human; for, as we shall see, he wasn't free from "the fear of man [which] bringeth a snare," and the desire to please the legalistic Jewish Christians. To please them at Antioch he was dishonest, causing other believers to join in his sin, bringing a rebuke by Paul²⁴. Perfect? Definitely not; but he was, as Jesus had predicted, a much better-qualified disciple after receiving this baptism than he was before. Jesus did not promise perfection for those first disciples, nor does He promise it to us; all He promised was spiritual power²⁵. And yet He made it clear to his followers that to be fully equipped, effective disciples, this baptism was essential for them. This baptism does not make the believer perfect; but it makes him a better, more effective Christian than he was before what Luke called, being "endued with power from on high, " and what Jesus promised would make the believers more effective "witnesses unto [Him]²⁶."

10. Peter's Amazing Message. (2:22-36)

Having quoted Joel's prophecy and set the stage, Peter then proceeds to demonstrate that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, and tells the crowd that they, with "wicked hands," have slain Him, but God has raised Him from the dead. Beginning with "Jesus of Nazareth, a man," Peter tells them that God has raised Jesus from the dead, a thing of which the 120 disciples gathered there are witnesses. He then tells them that it is this resurrected Messiah Who has sent the Holy Spirit to perform the miracles that they are witnessing ("He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear")²⁷. Peter builds his case, quoting Psalm 16:8-11 and Psalm 110:1, and ends by declaring that this man, whose crucifixion they have demanded and caused, is "**both Lord and Christ.**"

NOTES:

a. The progression within Peter's extemporaneous message is remarkable. He begins with "Jesus of Nazareth, a man," the identity of Jesus which the crowd

²³ Acts 4:13.

²⁴ Proverbs 29:25; Gal 2:9-14.

²⁵ Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8.

²⁶ Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8.

²⁷ Verse 33. This clearly fulfills the prophecy of John the Baptist--recorded in all four gospels--that Jesus would be the One Who baptizes in (with) the Holy Spirit. Jesus has now entered into his ministry as Holy Spirit Baptizer.

believes and holds; and then he proceeds to show them that Jesus is “both Lord and Christ.” As the result of Peter’s message they are completely convinced of this new, paradigm-changing truth, and they cry out for forgiveness and redemption. Actually, Peter continues to preach, again telling them that they are lost and need to be saved from “this untoward [crooked] generation”; but the climactic point in his message is when he declares that the One whom they have slain is “both Lord and Christ.”

*b. This is definitely **not** “seeker-friendly” preaching; and look at the results!*

c. In v 29 Peter states that David is still dead, and that his burial place “is with us unto this day.” David’s sepulcher became the burial place for several succeeding kings of Judah and was known and visited in the 1st Century.

The location pointed out from the Crusades until today, however, is on the southern hill of modern Jerusalem, commonly called Mt. Zion; but this cannot be the location of David's tomb, because his true burial place was within the city walls²⁸.

*d. Verse 33 is rich with revelation. In it Peter identifies the Lord Jesus as the One who has baptized the 120 disciples with (or in) the Holy Spirit. In all four gospels Jesus is identified by John the Baptist as the Holy Spirit Baptizer. Peter tells the crowd that this miraculous baptism is something that they “both see and hear” (they **see** the boldness and power with which Peter speaks the Truth, and they **hear** the miracle of praise and worship in unknown tongues.*

Jesus the Christ has now entered into his ministry as Holy Spirit Baptizer; and He will apparently continue as such until He returns in the Second Advent.

Also, one interesting-but-seldom-mentioned aspect of this declaration by John the Baptist is that he received this revelation directly from God the Father²⁹.

11. The Spiritual Harvest Following Peter’s Message. (2:37-41)

Pierced through with conviction, the people cry out to Peter and the rest of the apostles, asking what they should do. One can almost see them, convicted and desperate, looking frantically, first to one of the apostles, and then to another, asking how they can escape this terrible guilt.

Peter tells them that they must repent (a concept much neglected by many contemporary preachers) and be baptized for the remission of their sins (note the plural here in “sins”); and as a result they shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. And, he adds, this same promise applies to all others whom the Lord God shall call. Peter elaborates on their need for redemption, and an amazing 3,000 repent and are baptized that very day.

²⁸ Unger, Merrill F., "Unger's Bible Dictionary," p 247.

²⁹ Only John the Beloved tells us that John the Baptist received this revelation from the Father (John 1:32-34).

NOTE: One may wonder how so many people could be baptized in that place on that day. Were they immersed? Those who believe in baptism by sprinkling or pouring argue that immersing so many would not have been possible.

Others, who believe in baptism by immersion, reason that immersing could have been done in one or more of the nearby pools where many could have been baptized at one time.

Not far from the Temple there is a spring-fed pool called Bethesda³⁰. It is generally believed to be the pool where Jesus healed the man who had been crippled for 38 years. This pool (described in Jn 5:2 as "having five porches") has a large porch with five separate arches, and on the porch are faded frescoes depicting this healing by Jesus³¹.

It seems to me that since John the Baptist immersed people (including Jesus) in the Jordan, and that Philip will later apparently baptize the Ethiopian eunuch by immersion (Acts 8:36-39), and because the general Jewish understanding of baptism in that day was as a washing or bathing, they were probably immersed.

In the final analysis, however, the honest answer is that only God knows.

12. The Newborn Church Begins to Organize. The newly born Church immediately begins to find its form and function. The new believers listen to the teachings of the apostles, enjoy fellowship with one another, sharing meals and praying, as miracles are performed by the apostles, confirming the things that they are teaching³². At first these new Christians live communally, selling their possessions and pooling their resources. They are together daily, praising God in the Temple and sharing meals from house to house, as more people come to the Lord each day. (2:42-47)

NOTES:

a. Some Christians believe that all believers should live this way--i.e. communally; but as we shall see, although it appears that this situation was adopted at the beginning, it was a temporary arrangement and was soon abandoned. In the great "Jesus people" revival that swept the nation, and other parts of the World, in the 1960s and 1970s, many of those excited new believers coalesced into communal groups, living together, sharing food and other possessions. Many "house churches" sprang up, with excited, new believers gathering naturally around local leaders and teachers. But, for the most part, as was the case in the 1st Century Church, it didn't last.

b. This communal living of the first Christians, recorded in vv 42-47 appears not to have been absolute. Verse 46 here, in speaking of the disciples' having

³⁰ Bethesda is an Aramaic word meaning "house of grace."

³¹ See in this regard John 5:1-9, and Unger, "Bethesda," pp 139-140.

³² See in this regard Mark 16:20.

fellowship “from house to house,” suggests at least that some or all retained ownership of their homes. We shall see more about this in Chapter 4, vv 32-37³³. At any rate, if this communal ownership of property was absolute, it appears that it didn’t last. Subsequent passages, as we shall see, make it clear that some of the believer’s had homes of their own³⁴. Of course, it is possible that these references to the homes of various Christians mean that they were the homes assigned to them by the authorities in the Church; but there is no evidence to support this possibility. In fact, the context in each case strongly argues against it; it would be a completely unsupported conjecture.

c. It is important to notice that all of these original Christians were Jews. The original Church was a Jewish Church. They “continued daily...in the Temple, and breaking bread from house to house.” They were living this exciting, liberating, new life as Christians, but they were still Jews; they celebrated the feasts, circumcised their baby boys, and attended prayers in the Temple. As the very next chapter begins, we see Peter and John going “up to the Temple to pray³⁵.” It will require some time, and a great deal of adjustment, for the New Covenant Church to separate itself from the Old Covenant Law; but it will happen, as a result of the adding of Gentiles to the Church. A council in Jerusalem, led by James, the brother of Jesus, will decide that the requirements of the Law are no longer applicable to Christians³⁶. Paul will teach strongly, that to depend on any requirement of the law (such as circumcision) for redemption will require the observance of the entire Law, a thing impossible to do, and a practice that can negate the possibility of redemption³⁷. Within a few years the transition will be made and, in the broad view, it is a beautiful thing. Rather than an abrupt break with the Law, suddenly replaced by Grace, it is God’s seamless plan of salvation, a gradual transition, as the New Covenant fulfills the Old.

13. A Lame Man is Healed. (3:1-11)

Soon after the birth of the Church at Pentecost, Peter and John go up to the Temple to pray. A man, lame from birth, has been carried daily to the entrance to the Temple called the “gate Beautiful” to beg³⁸. As Peter and John walk by him, the man asks for money, and they stop. Peter and John fasten their eyes on the

³³ This passage tells us that Barnabas owned "some land" and sold it; it does not say that he sold his home. Those early believers definitely took care of one another; but there is no evidence that they lived together in one encampment or commune.

³⁴ Acts 9:11; 10:6; 12:12; 16:40; 21:8.

³⁵ In the same way that people of that time and place spoke of going “up” to Jerusalem, regardless of direction, because it was on a higher elevation than the surrounding country, they spoke of going “up” to the Temple, because it was on the highest hill in the city.

³⁶ Acts 15:1-29.

³⁷ Galatians 5:1-4.

³⁸ The identity of this gate is uncertain, but it was probably the eastern gate, facing the Kidron Valley.

man, and Peter tells him to look at them. The man looks up at them, expecting money, but Peter has a better idea. He says to the man that he has no money to give him, but he has something much better; and then he says, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk."

The man, undoubtedly confused, looks at Peter and does nothing. After all, what else would he do? He has never, in his entire life, stood--much less walked. Then Peter takes the beggar by the hand and lifts him up; and as he lifts the man, his feet and ankles (and, we may assume, his atrophied legs) are healed³⁹! Astonished and joyful, the beggar goes into the Temple with Peter and John, alternately walking, leaping, and praising God for joy, and this draws a crowd! The people, coming together in Solomon's Porch, recognize the man and know that a remarkable miracle has occurred⁴⁰.

NOTES:

a. This miracle could not be denied, or explained away, by the enemies of the gospel, for this man has been sitting by the gate, begging, for his entire life. Most of the people in the Temple know him; and, undoubtedly, some have known him since he was first carried to the gate and placed there, as a child, to beg.

b. Notice that the first thing Peter said to the man was, "Look on us⁴¹!" I have encountered beggars in a number of foreign lands and, sad to relate, in recent times it is also common in this nation. One thing I have noticed about beggars is that they often don't look at me, even when I drop money in their bowl or cup, and even if they thank me they don't look up.. Why? Their minds were not on me; their minds were somewhere else. Receiving the money was a mechanical matter and not a human interaction.

But I remember one glittering exception: a legless man on the sidewalk in downtown Santiago, Chile. He looked up at me, before I gave him anything. When I did, he smiled and thanked me; and in his beautiful eyes was that light that shines only from the eyes of Christians, which he was. I know this because I asked him; and the truth of it radiated from him. As you can tell by reading these words, he was so exceptional, and so real, that I have never forgotten him. He looked at me; and when he did I saw Jesus.

³⁹ Not only would the leg muscles be completely undeveloped, but the lame man's legs would also have been unnaturally short, for long bones (such as the bones of the upper and lower legs) grow along lines of stress; if no weight is ever put on them they don't lengthen.

⁴⁰ This took place in the Court of the Congregation, in one of the roofed porticos called "Solomon's Porch, a place where Jesus seems often to have gone, and where He did much of his teaching in Jerusalem. It was the scene of one of his intense confrontations with the Pharisees (Jn 10:23f).

⁴¹ I have added the exclamation mark to what Peter said because I believe it to be appropriate. Remember that in the original Greek there are no punctuation marks at all; they have been added, like verse and chapter divisions, as the translators deemed them appropriate. And, in my imagination, I hear Peter saying, in a commanding manner, "Look at us, because something extremely important is about to happen, and I want your full attention!"

c. Jesus has undoubtedly passed by this beggar many times, as He came to the Temple, and as He left it. He could easily have healed the man; yet He didn't. Why, I must wonder, had He not done it?

(1) The beggar wasn't asking to be healed--he was asking for money. It appears that Jesus healed only those who asked to be healed, and again we must ask why this is true; it seems that He will not force anything on us--even blessings⁴².

(2) In addition, I like the possibility that Jesus thought, as He had passed this crippled man so many times, "I think I will save this one for Peter and John, for it will bring about great things." And it did--and is doing it still.

14. Peter Preaches Again. (3:12-26)

Seizing the moment, Peter begins to preach, hitting the crowd hard with his opening words. Asking them why they are surprised, he says that it is Jesus who has healed the man, and he reminds them that it was they who demanded his crucifixion, when Pilate wanted to free Him. It was they, he reminds them, who "denied the Holy One and just," demanded that a murderer be set free, and killed instead "the Prince of Life whom God has raised from the dead⁴³." He tells them to repent and have their sins "blotted out⁴⁴." In a condensed version of what he preached at Pentecost, Peter summarizes the prophecies which Jesus fulfilled as the Christ, and reminds them that they are doomed without Him.

15. The Priests and Sadducees Are Not Pleased. (4:1-4)

While Peter and John are speaking to the crowd, the priests, Sadducees and the ruler of the Temple arrive, and they are definitely not pleased. The Sadducees are particularly offended because Peter and John are teaching the people that Jesus was raised from the dead. In fact, they are so offended that they arrest Peter and John and lock them up. But the priests and Sadducees are too late—the truth has already been preached, and they can't "put the genie back in the bottle." The Holy Spirit has taken over, and 5,000 men are set free from their sins and born anew⁴⁵!

NOTES:

a. The Captain of the Temple was not a soldier; he was a priest who commanded the Temple Police--those who guarded the Temple. Today he would be called the

⁴² In this regard, see II Peter 3:9 and Matthew 7:14, **in this order**; It is the will of God that **all** be saved; yet Jesus said that most will die lost and unredeemed. The woman with the issue of blood was afraid to ask Him to heal her, but her desperate desire was obvious. When Jesus raised the dead son at Nain the dead son couldn't ask to be raised; but the crying need for it was clearly evident in his weeping, widowed mother's situation.

⁴³ As on the day of Pentecost, this is **not** "seeker-friendly" preaching by Peter; it is **truth** preaching.

⁴⁴ The Greek word rendered "blotted out" is *exaleipho*, and it is extremely significant. It is intensive, and means to wash or wipe away **completely**. Our sins, it seems, are not just lined-out in God's records, but still to be seen; rather, they are removed with heavenly ink eradicater, as if they had never been there. The page is fresh and clean--as it was before anything was written there. See Hebrews 8:12 and 10:17.

⁴⁵ This amazing number does not include women and children! This mass conversion eclipses that of Pentecost; and, again, this was definitely **not** "seeker-friendly" preaching.

Chief of Security or the Chief of Police. He was referred to in ancient Jewish writings as “the man of the Temple Mount”⁴⁶.

b. It is interesting that, even today, like the Sadducees, some critical, humanistic scholars are offended by, and deny, the bodily resurrection of Jesus. The same is true of most cults (for the example, the official position of the Jehovah’s Witnesses about the resurrection is, “we don’t know what became of the body”).

The resurrection of Jesus is the single most important event in human history. If Jesus was not resurrected, he is only a dead Jewish teacher who made false claims about himself and prophesied falsely. If Jesus was not resurrected physically, then you and I are lost and undone, without a Redeemer, without a covenant and without hope. To quote the great apostle Paul, “And if Christ be not raised your faith is in vain; ye are yet in your sins.” If, however, He was resurrected (and He most definitely was), then the Bible’s gainsayers are likely to be also wrong about everything else concerning miracles.

16. Peter and John Before the Sanhedrin. (4:5-12)

The next morning the Sanhedrin gathers, including Annas, Caiphas, and the relatives of the High Priest⁴⁷. Peter and John are brought before them for judgment. Peter, freshly “filled with the Holy Ghost,” addresses the Sanhedrin. Empowered and emboldened by the Spirit, Peter goes on the offensive. Speaking as plainly to the council as he had to the crowd in the Temple the day before, he says that if they want to know how the crippled man was healed, he was healed by Jesus whom they had killed, but God had raised from the dead. He says these things with the healed man standing with him as “Exhibit A”; and, pressing on, he then quotes Psalm 118:22, clearly implying that the prophecy speaks of Jesus, the Cornerstone, and that it is they who have fulfilled the prophecy by rejecting and crucifying Him. Finishing, Peter says that salvation is to be found nowhere except in Jesus. The council has not even stated the charges against Peter and John, and Peter has already won the debate.

NOTES:

a. This is a fulfillment of what Jesus promised in Luke 12:11-12.

b. Notice that Peter, as he prepares to answer the charges of the council, is “filled with the Holy Ghost.” We must ask ourselves why, when he has already been filled with the Holy Ghost (Spirit) on the day of Pentecost. Why does he need again to be filled with the Spirit? The answer is that the initial infilling at Pentecost was the promised baptism in (with) the Holy Spirit. Because, however,

⁴⁶ Edersheim, Alfred, quoted in Unger, pp 180-181. See also in this regard 5:24.

⁴⁷ This group would have included Malchus, the one whose ear Peter had cut off. In an example of the detailed nature of Luke’s recording of history, we learn here that two of the family members were named John and Alexander, although nothing more is recorded concerning them in the Bible.

there is an ongoing need for this empowerment, it is renewed periodically, to meet the needs of certain situations, such as this one. As C.I. Scofield, author of the Scofield Study Bible, put it, there is "one baptism, but many fillings." Why all the subsequent infillings? D.L. Moody, when asked why he continued to say that he needed to "get his cup filled," when it had already been filled, replied simply, "It leaks." We shall see more of this renewed filling, or "re-filling" with the Holy Spirit in 4:31, 7:55 and 13:52.

17. Checkmate for the Sanhedrin. (4:13-22)

Seeing the boldness of Peter and John (apparently they both fired bursts of verbal gunshots at the council, although only Peter's words are recorded), the members of the council are perplexed. Knowing that they are dealing with "unlearned and ignorant men," the power and boldness of the two convince them "that they had been with Jesus." Not only that, the healed man is standing there, looking at them, and he is known to be "above 40 years old." What is a religious despot to do? Peter, John and the healed man are sent out of the room and a council is held. The members of the council realize that they are in checkmate. There is no denying that "a notable miracle" has been performed. But, instead of being convicted and turning to Jesus themselves, their concern is that news of the miracle might spread⁴⁸.

They call Peter and John back into the hearing room, impotently threaten them, and command them not "to speak at all, nor teach in this Name⁴⁹." Peter, freshly empowered by the Holy Spirit, is not impressed with their empty threats. He challenges the council to judge whether it is better to obey them, or obey God. He then pronounces his position: that it would be wrong to fail to speak of "the things [miracles of God] which we have seen and heard." With this the members of the council, fearing the reaction of the people, are completely de-fanged. All they can do is to again threaten them, command them not to speak any more of Jesus, and release them.

They might as well have commanded Mockingbirds not to sing.

18. The Believers Rejoice, and Are Again Filled with the Spirit. (4:23-31)

Peter and John, (almost certainly accompanied by the healed man) return to the other disciples with the good news of what happened before the council. There is an explosion of rejoicing, praise and worship! Quoting from Psalm 2 (probably another miracle), the people praise God, asking Him to continue to give his people boldness, and to continue to stretch forth his hand to heal and perform other signs and wonders. God immediately responds to their request, and with flourish!

⁴⁸ These blind fools have learned **nothing!** How could the news **not** spread, when more than 5,000 had already seen it and believed, and were undoubtedly "blazing it abroad," telling everyone who would listen.

⁴⁹ The capital "N" here is mine--not the Sanhedrin's.

Suddenly, the place where they are gathered is shaken, and they are all “filled with the Holy Ghost” (again). And the result is both what they requested, and what Jesus had earlier promised (1:8): they “spoke the word of God with boldness.”

The new-born Church is getting under way!

19. Enter Barnabas of Cyprus. (4:32-37)

The young Church continues to grow, and the people continue to share what they have with one another. One of them, Barnabas, a Levite from Cyprus, sells some land that he owns and gives the money to the common fund which is kept by the apostles. This Barnabas will become an apostle, and a significant leader in the 1st Century Church⁵⁰. The money from the sale of Barnabas’ land must have been a considerable amount, for it seems to have inspired a couple in the group, Ananias, and Sapphira, to do something similar.

20. The Serious Mistake of Ananias and Sapphira. (5:1-11)

Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, apparently inspired by what Barnabas has done, decide to sell a possession and give some of the money to the common fund--but not all of it. It appears that they desired the recognition and approval that Barnabas has received for giving so much money, but decided to keep some of the money for themselves. Although it is not recorded, they must have said that they were giving all of the proceeds from the sale, wishing for the praise. This is clearly implied by what Peter says in verses 3 and 4, and it was a serious mistake--one might say, a fatal error. Like Barnabas, they gave the money to the common fund (“laid it at the apostles’ feet”). Unlike Barnabas, they were not being honest about it. The truth of what they have done is revealed by the Holy Spirit to Peter, and he confronts Ananias⁵¹. Asking him, rhetorically, why he has lied to the Holy Spirit, Peter points out the obvious: that the property had belonged to Ananias, and it was his to do with as he chose⁵². Had he kept part, or all, of the proceeds, and been honest about it, the rest of the disciples would have thought no less of him; but he chose to deceive, in order to receive praise for false generosity. This is obviously a serious matter, for Ananias, hearing Peter’s words, drops dead! Other men immediately wrap Ananias in burial cloths, take him out, and bury him.

About three hours later Sapphira, unaware of what has transpired, comes in and is met by Peter, who immediately confronts her with “the moment of truth.” He

⁵⁰ See Acts 14:14. His given name was Joses; but, as Jesus had given Simon the new name Peter, the apostles gave Joses this new name, meaning “son of consolation. Barnabas must have been a compassionate man. An example of this will be his forgiving his nephew, John Mark, for turning back from the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabus (Acts 16:36-41).

⁵¹ This appears to be an example of the gift of the word of knowledge at work (Acts 12:8); it is quickly repeated in dealing with Sapphira, wife of Ananias..

⁵² By this we can see that the communal sharing of possessions by the first Christians was voluntary--not compulsive.

asks her if the land was sold for the amount that she and her husband had announced, and she replies, “Yes--that is the amount that we received.” Peter rebukes her, confronting her with the truth. And then, in what may have been the most blunt death notification of all time, Peter tells her that the footsteps that she hears approaching are those of the men who have just buried her husband, and that they will soon be doing the same with her. Apparently in shock, like her husband, Sapphira drops dead. She is prepared for burial, and the same men take her out and bury her. This amazing episode, understandably, gave pause to the entire Church; they had much to contemplate.

NOTES:

a. Although the nine supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit will not be explained and codified for us in Scripture until Paul writes his first letter to the Corinthians, Peter’s supernatural knowledge of the dishonesty of Ananias was a manifestation of the “word of knowledge.” His announcement to Sapphira, that she would soon join her husband in death, was either a manifestation of the word of knowledge or a prophecy; as we shall see later (I Cor 12:7-11), sometimes it is difficult to know which label to apply.

b. The Jehovah’s Witnesses don’t know what to make of the Bible’s Holy Spirit, but they definitely deny that He is divine. Here, however, in two verses that they seem not to have noticed, Peter clearly declares them wrong. In v 3 he says that Ananias has lied to the Holy Ghost. And then, in v 5, Peter tells him that, in lying to the Holy Ghost, he has lied “to God.”

c. Some mistakenly believe that Peter struck both Ananias and Sapphira dead; but the passage does not tell us that. Peter simply told them, directly and without embellishment, what God had revealed to him. It appears that they both had sudden-death heart attacks, perhaps as an act of God. At any rate, their deaths are unexplained, and were apparently instantaneous.

d. Some, who are attracted to the concept of communal living, will say that in this episode the individuals sold all that they had, as is implied in Acts 2:44-45, and gave all to a communal fund which was then distributed by the apostles according to need; but this is not what the passage says. Rather, Barnabas, “having land, sold it...”; it does not say that he sold everything he had. Likewise, Ananias and Sapphira “sold a possession”--not all that they had. Those very early Christians were definitely pooling possessions, and the apostles were distributing to the needy as required; but there is no evidence that all of them contributed all that they possessed. And, as the Church grew and spread, this practice evolved, becoming a matter within the local congregations, in which widows and others who were unable to support themselves were provided with the necessities of life. As early

as Chapt 6 we see that food was being distributed only to the widows--not to everyone in the church⁵³.

Those who attempted to abuse this system by pretending to be unable to work were dealt with by the elders in the local church. As we shall see, Paul the apostle had strong feelings about such abuse of the system⁵⁴.

21. Jerusalem Is Ablaze with the Good News! (5:12-16)

The Holy Spirit's fire is setting Jerusalem ablaze with news of healing and other miracles, performed as the apostles preach. They gathered daily in the Temple, in Solomon's Porch where Jesus had so often gone to preach and teach; and the crowds are larger and larger. Excitement fills the city, and those who are sick and demonized are brought as near to the disciples as they can be. Some, who cannot get into the temple's outer court because of the size of the crowds, bring their sick and lay them on pallets in the street nearby, hoping that even Peter's shadow might fall across them and heal them. It would be a massive understatement to say that the good news is getting around, and is joyfully believed!

There is so much excitement, so many miracles of healing and deliverance from demonic bondage being performed by the apostles and other disciples, that one would think that Jesus is still there. Well, in a mysterious way, he is⁵⁵!

NOTE:

a. *It doesn't say here that people were healed by having Peter's shadow fall across them; it only says that the people believed that Peter's shadow would heal them. If the sick were really healed by being touched with Peter's shadow, this could be part of the explanation of the bewildering statement of Jesus in John 14:12, for there is no record of Jesus' having ever done this.*

b. *The word "mysterious" is used in the theological sense. A holy mystery is an infinite fact that cannot be grasped by our finite minds, such as the fact that God has "always" existed, or the mystery of the Holy Trinity, or the fascinating statement of Jesus, "before Abraham was, I Am."*

Jesus has told his disciples on the night in which He was betrayed that He must leave them, but would send "another Comforter" to take his place. Yet, in that same conversation he promised (Jn 14:23) that if the disciples love and obey Him, both He and the Father will make their abode with them. And we are told in Mk 16:20 that as the disciples go into all the World, spreading the good news of redemption, the Lord said that He would be with them.

These things seem contradictory, and are definitely holy mysteries; yet they are no less true.

⁵³ Acts 6:1.

⁵⁴ II Thessalonians 3:6-12.

⁵⁵ Mark 16:20; Jn 14:23.

As the great German writer, scientist, statesman and philosopher, Wolfgang von Goethe, expressed the matter of the holy mysteries, "The greatest happiness of the thinking man is to have fathomed [understood] what can be fathomed, and quietly to reverence that which is unfathomable."

22. The Prison Cannot Hold the Apostles! (5:17-26)

News of the great events taking place in the Temple grounds continues to reach the High Priests and the Sanhedrin, and they are threatened by the excitement of the crowds, which grow larger daily. They are particularly offended by the preaching that Jesus is alive, and that it is by Him that the miracles are performed, for they are mostly Sadducees, who deny that there is life after death⁵⁶. Again they arrest the apostles and put them in prison, and maddening things are about to happen to those religious rulers⁵⁷.

During the night an angel enters the prison, and supernaturally leads the apostles out. As they leave the prison, the angel tells them to go back to the Temple and teach all of the things that Jesus has taught them; and this they do, beginning at daybreak. Also early in the morning, the High Priest arrives at the Temple, convenes the council, and orders that the apostles be brought before him. The guards go to the prison and find that it is locked and that all is in order; but there is one problem: the prisoners are not there. The guards return to report this, and while the leaders are trying to take in this bewildering news, things suddenly get worse. A messenger arrives and tells them that those men, whom they had put in prison the day before, are standing in the Temple Court, "teaching the people." Annas and Caiphas must have shrieked, pulled out their hair and rent their garments! One would expect that, by now, they would realize that they are fighting God and repent; but no--their eyes are blind, their ears are deaf, and their hearts are hardened. They have the apostles re-arrested.

23. The Apostles Are Arrested Again--but Gently. (5:27-32)

The apostles are arrested again, but politely and gently, for the Captain of the Temple and the guards fear that, if they are rough, the crowd will stone them. They clearly see which way the popular wind is blowing⁵⁸.

The apostles are taken before the High Priest, who reminds them that he has previously forbidden them to teach in "this name." In obviously guilty language, he accuses them of trying to bring "this man's blood upon us" (which, of course, is

⁵⁶ It appears that, at this time, the ruling party in Jerusalem is the Sadducee party, and that Annas, Caiphas and most of the others of the Sanhedrin, are Sadducees. But their being offended was not just theological; they had spread a false story that the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus and hid it, to explain away the reality of the Resurrection.

⁵⁷ Before, it was only Peter and John; this time it appears that all 12 of them are arrested and locked in the prison.

⁵⁸ It was for this same reason that the High Priest wanted to arrest Jesus in a secluded place like Gethsemane--not in the presence of the people.

exactly where Jesus' blood lies: all over their wicked hands). The apostles, undaunted, reply that "We ought to obey God rather than men." But they do not stop here. They go ahead and repeat their previous testimony: that they (the council members) have slain Jesus and hung Him on a tree (cross), but that God has raised Him from the dead and exalted Him at his right hand as Prince and Savior. And, again, they declare that they are all witnesses of these things, as is the Holy Ghost Whom God has given to all who believe and obey Him.

NOTE: It is interesting that, today, the Hasidic Jews in Israel (and elsewhere) will not speak of Jesus by name; rather, they refer to Him as "this man," as Caiphias does here. These Hasidic Jews (plural, Hasidim) are often referred to as "ultra-orthodox," but this is utterly erroneous. The Hasidim are ultra-religious, but are not ultra-orthodox. In fact, they are not orthodox at all. They do not study the Word of God. Rather, they study the writings of their favorite rabbis, i.e. the traditions of men which, Jesus said, make "the Word of God of none effect." They religiously observe the weekly Sabbath and the feasts; but their primary doctrinal source is not the Bible. Rather, it is the "Cabala" (variously spelled), an evil, occult, medieval commentary on the OT Scriptures.

24. Wise Counsel from Gamaliel. (5:33-42)

Annas, Caiphias and the Sadducees are "cut to the heart" with guilt, pride and murderous anger! They threaten the apostles with death, and begin to make plans for their execution. There is, however, a voice of reason among them: Gamaliel, a doctor of the law and a Pharisee, one greatly respected and wise. He directs that the apostles be removed from the counsel room so that they can discuss this in closed session. Alone with the council, he reminds them of recent false leaders who have temporarily created excitement among the people, but who came to naught, and their followers are scattered. He advises that they release the apostles, for, he says, if they are not of God they will also perish and be forgotten. But, he points out, if they are truly of God, the council cannot overthrow what they are doing, and they definitely don't want to be found fighting God. The others agree. They then have the apostles beaten and released, and the apostles rejoice that they have been allowed to "suffer shame for [the Lord's] name." They return to the others and they all continue daily to teach and preach the good news of Jesus, in the Temple and in homes.

NOTES:

*a. This Gamaliel is one of the most revered men in Jewish history. He was the grandson of the great Rabbi Hillel (110 BC-10 AD), perhaps **the** most important rabbi in Jewish theological history. Rabbi Gamaliel was so accomplished in the knowledge of the law, and so revered for his character and wisdom, that he is one of only seven rabbis who have been honored with the honorific title, "rabban*

[master teacher].” He was called “the beauty of the law,” and it is written of him in the Talmud, “since Rabban Gamaliel died, the glory of the law has ceased.” He was also the mentor of the young Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, who would become Paul the apostle (Acts 22:3).

Church tradition has it that Gamaliel later became a Christian, and was baptized by Paul and Peter, together with his son of the same name, and Nicodemus, who had secretly visited Jesus (Jn 3)⁵⁹.

b. Teaching and preaching are different ministries. In v 42, as elsewhere in the NT, the Greek rendered “teaching” is a form of the verb “didasko,” to impart instruction; and the Greek rendered “preaching” is a form of the verb “euangelizo,” to proclaim (the good news of the gospel).

25. The Church Begins to Organize: the First Deacons. (6:1-7)

With the number of Christians rapidly increasing, it becomes necessary to begin to organize. It seems that the basic nature of sin-capable man has not changed since Adam and Eve were evicted from the Garden of Eden. There are already jealousies and suspicions and conflicts within the Church, and all such problems are brought to the apostles for resolution. The apostles are so overloaded with such complaints that the system has become unworkable, so the apostles call the Christians together⁶⁰.

The problem that finally triggers this organizing is a conflict over food; the Gentile Christians complain that their widows are not being fed as well as are the Jewish Christian widows. The apostles say that they can no longer deal with such problems because it interferes with their need for prayer and spiritual ministry. They therefore decree that seven men be selected to serve as deacons, managing such things as the distribution of necessities to the destitute, including food⁶¹.

These men must have three qualifications: they must be of good reputation, Holy Spirit-filled, and wise. Seven are selected by the congregation; Stephen is apparently so well-known and respected that he is chosen first. The other six are Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a Gentile proselyte of Antioch. These seven men are presented to the apostles who pray, lay their hands on them, and ordain them.

The Church continues to grow rapidly in Jerusalem; even a large number of the priests in the Temple accept Jesus as Messiah and become believers.

⁵⁹ Unger's Bible Dictionary, p 388.

⁶⁰ One wonders where such a meeting could have been held. With a group so large, it seems likely that they had to meet in an open field or in the Temple courtyard.

⁶¹ This is a New Testament parallel with the Exodus, when Moses could no longer deal personally with all the problems of the people (Ex 18:13-26).

Stephen, the first-chosen of the seven deacons, does not confine himself just to mundane administrative matters, for verse 8 closes this passage by telling us that he, "full of faith and power," performed miracles in ministering to the people in the Church. Stephen will soon become the Church's first martyr.

NOTES:

a. This choosing of the seven deacons is the beginning of a separation of function in Church leadership that continues to this day. An elder (the Greek is "presbuteros" [elder] or "episcopas" [overseer]), is concerned primarily with spiritual oversight and leadership⁶². A deacon (the Greek is "diakonos" [servant]) is primarily concerned with practical matters, such as management of Church property and functions. This word for deacon/servant is clearly distinguished from the word for a slave or bond servant, which is "duolos." That there were multiple deacons and elders/bishops in each local congregation in the early Church may clearly be seen in Paul's letter to the church at Philippi (Phil 1:1)⁶³. The same is implied in I Peter 5:1-3. We shall see the qualifications for the positions of elder/bishop and deacon in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

b. The conversion of large numbers of priests must have created management problems in the carrying on of Temple worship; but, if it did, we are told nothing of it.

c. If there were problems with the fleshly nature this early in Church history, we should not be surprised that the same problems occur in the Church today.

26. Stephen the Deacon is Falsely Accused. (6:8-15)

Stephen, one of the first seven deacons, is full of the Holy Spirit's power, and he performs great miracles among the people. A group of Jews from other countries belonging to a certain synagogue, called that of the Libertines, takes great offense at what Stephen preaches and does. They argue theology with him, but cannot win the arguments, so they falsely accuse him of blasphemies. They bring charges against him before the Sanhedrin, and hire witnesses to swear to false things about him--lies and complete fabrications. Standing before the Council, his face radiates with the Holy Spirit's presence within him; to the members of the Council, he has the appearance of an angel, but their hard hearts are not touched. He will become the Church's first martyr.

NOTE: *There are various opinions concerning who and what these "Libertines" were. Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish philosopher and respected leader whose life was contemporary with Jesus and the first apostles, wrote that they were Jews,*

⁶² These terms, elder and overseer, are used interchangeably in the NT. Episcopas (overseer) is sometimes rendered "bishop."

⁶³ This important distinction between offices is clearly seen in Jerome's Latin Vulgate, the first complete Bible (382-405 AD), where the Latin reads, *episkopis et diaconis (Latin) "overseers and deacons"*.

enslaved by Pompey when he conquered and put down the Jewish rebellion, and were later given their freedom, who built a synagogue in Jerusalem for their use when visiting there. Saul of Tarsus may have been a member of this group although, as a hereditary Roman citizen (a thing of which he was very proud), it is unlikely that he was ever enslaved.

27. Stephen Answers False Charges. (7:1-53)

The High Priest asks Stephen to respond to the charges, and he is ready. In 52 verses he brilliantly summarizes Jewish history, from Abraham to that present day, concluding logically that Jesus is the Christ and that they have murdered Him. It is an amazing example of perfectly combining brevity with completeness.

- a. From the calling of Abraham to the Abrahamic Covenant. (7:2-8)
- b. From the selling of Joseph into Slavery to the Death of Jacob. (7:9-16)
- c. From the Enslavement of the Israelites to the Calling of Moses. (7:17-34)
- d. From the Exodus to the Giving of the Law at Sinai. (7:35-43)
- e. From worship in the Tabernacle to worship in the Temple. (7:44-50)
- f. Stephen Goes on the offensive. With Jewish history brought up to date, Stephen reminds the members of the council of the unwelcome truth that their ancestors had killed the prophets whom God sent to tell them of the Messiah to come. Then he hammers them with their own guilt as betrayers and murderers of “the Just One,” the long-awaited Messiah.” (7:51-53)

28. The Truth Is More than They Can Stand. (7:54-57)

The members of the Sanhedrin aren’t just offended--they are overwhelmed with an explosion of murderous fury, grinding their teeth. While they reel and rage, infuriated by Stephen’s words he, filled with the Holy Spirit, looks up and sees the glory of the presence of God in Heaven, and Jesus “standing on the right hand of God.” He tells the council what he is seeing, and this is too much! Holding their hands over their ears, unable to stand any more of the truth, and what they see as his blasphemy, they completely lose control. With a shout, they rush on him.

NOTES:

a. The trial of Stephen, though rigged against him, was not completed. The council heard the perjured witnesses and Stephen, but the High Priest did not ask the members of the council for their opinions and then pronounce judgment. The trial ended, abruptly and prematurely, when the council members lost control and rushed at Stephen. Abandoning even the appearance of a deliberative body, they became a murderous mob.

b. According to Hebr 1:3, and the ancient summary of scriptural truth that we call The Apostles’ Creed, when the resurrected Jesus ascended from the Mount of Olives, back to Heaven, He was seated at the right hand of the Father. Yet, out of

love and respect for Stephen, Jesus did two amazing things: (1) He stood up! and, (2) He allowed Stephen to see Him stand up, and all of the glory of the Father.

We can only wonder what expression was on the face of Jesus as He and Stephen looked at one another; but my guess is that Jesus spoke eloquently with his eyes, and that his expression was a combination of pride, encouragement, and aching compassion for the death by stoning that Stephen was about to experience.

This is only my opinion; but I believe that the significance of the rising of Jesus from his heavenly throne, to stand as an apparent expression of respect, his allowing Stephen to see it all, and his likely eye contact and wordless exchange with Stephen just before his stoning, are worthy of a thoughtful pause⁶⁴.

29. The Stoning of Stephen. (7:58-8:2)

Stephen is dragged outside the city wall and stoned⁶⁵. Symbolically, the robes of the council members are laid at the feet of a rising young Pharisee named Saul⁶⁶. This symbolizes his approval of the execution and, perhaps, makes him the master of ceremonies, presiding over it.

As the large stones begin to strike Stephen he prays, asking the Lord Jesus to receive his spirit, as Jesus, on the cross, had asked the Father to receive his. Then, even as Jesus had prayed for his executioners, Stephen speaks his last words on Earth: with a loud voice, he asks that his executioners be forgiven for killing him. With that, the Church's first martyr dies. To quote Merrill Unger, "In the beautiful language of Scripture, [he] 'fell asleep'⁶⁷."

Devout men carry Stephen's broken and bloody body away and bury him with great lamentation.

NOTE: *Here is another appearance of the Triune God. The Father and the Son are seen by Stephen, and the Spirit, filling him, makes it possible for Stephen to see Them. For more on the Holy Trinity, see "The Mystery of the Holy Trinity" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).*

30. Persecution Scatters the Church. (8:3-4)

This same Saul, the Pharisee who watched approvingly the stoning of Stephen, goes on a campaign of persecution, in direct contradiction of his mentor, Gamaliel. Going from house to house, apparently with a warrant from the Sanhedrin, Saul

⁶⁴ When considering this speculation about Jesus' making eye contact with Stephen, we must remember how Jesus thinks. In this regard, consider Matthew 26:61; Lk 22:669-75; Mk 16:7 and the study guide to Mk 16:1-8 with the explanatory **NOTE** following, **in this order**.

⁶⁵ It was the custom for the actual stoning to be done by the witnesses who had testified against the one being executed; this was supposed to make witnesses less willing to lie in a capital case. Thus the sin of these false witnesses was much the worse, for they also did the murdering. They were indeed hard-hearted men, with consciences seared by sin.

⁶⁶ This young Pharisee will be converted by the risen Jesus (Acts 9), will become an apostle and the human author of approximately 2/3 of the New Testament, and will himself die as a martyr in Rome.

⁶⁷ Unger's Bible Dictionary, p 1046.

arrests Christians and puts them in prison. Many of them will die as Stephen did⁶⁸. The Jerusalem Church is scattered, and those driven away proclaim the gospel wherever they go. Like trying to beat out a grass fire, when the scattered sparks only start more fires, the persecution in Jerusalem only scatters the believers, with their good news of redemption, far and wide. The Church will soon spread throughout the known World; but its headquarters will remain in Jerusalem.

31. Philip Takes the Gospel to Samaria. (8:5-13)

Philip who, like Stephen, is one of the seven original deacons, goes down to the city of Samaria and preaches the gospel of Christ there. The Samaritan people are receptive to the preaching of Philip because of the miracles that accompany and validate his ministry ("hearing and seeing the miracles which he did"). Many are set free from the torments of evil spirits, which come out of them screaming and shouting, and many who are paralyzed and otherwise crippled are healed. As the liberating, redeeming power of the Holy Spirit sweeps the City there is great joy there.

Prior to this time, however, the people of the city had been bewitched and deceived into following a false teacher named Simon, a sorcerer/magician who had convinced the people that he was a mighty man of God. He had deceived them all, including the city's governor; but the preaching and healing ministry of Stephen has set them free, and they are gladly baptized in water. Simon himself believes, knowing that the miracles of Philip are genuine, and not the deceptive sorcery that he has practiced; Simon also is baptized and attaches himself to Philip, staying close and marveling at the miracles he sees.

32. Samaritans Receive the Holy Spirit. (8:14-17)

Word of the great revival in Samaria reaches Jerusalem, and the church there sends Peter and John, apparently to see it for themselves and to assist Stephen. They see that the people have truly believed and been baptized in water, but they still lack one thing: Peter and John pray for the people to receive the baptism in (or with) the Holy Spirit. They lay their hands on them, and the Spirit falls on the people, filling and empowering them, as He had the 120 disciples at Pentecost.

NOTES:

a. We are not told which city of Samaria was the scene of this great revival, but it appears almost certain that it was Samaria, the capital city, where the kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel had their palaces 1,000 years earlier. Reason

⁶⁸ This campaign of imprisoning and killing Christians, so zealously undertaken by Saul, is in direct contradiction of the wise guidance of Gamaliel, his teacher and spiritual father (5:38-39).

suggests that if Philip wanted to take the gospel to the Samaritans he would begin in the capital city. Reinforcing this position are the facts that the scene of the revival is called “city” (not “village,” or “town” as in the scenes of the subsequent preaching of Peter and John [v 25]), and by the use of the definite article in v 5, (“...’the’ city of Samaria”).

***b.** As we proceed through the Acts of the Apostles we shall see a pattern emerge in the conversion and making of new Christians. They first hear the good news of salvation, believe and receive Jesus as Messiah/Redeemer; they are then baptized in water in his name; and they are then baptized in (filled with) the Holy Spirit, usually in this order. **However,** it is vitally important to remember that God is not at all legalistic, and it is dangerous to try to make rules about how spiritual things must happen, and what words must be said. We will deal with this principle again, but in terms of the process in the making of new Christians we will see that Saul, when he is converted, is filled with the Holy Spirit before he is baptized in water (Acts 9). And we shall see in Chapter 10, as Peter preached to Gentiles in Caesaria, the Holy Spirit fell on the listeners while he was still preaching, and then they were baptized in water. God is not restricted by rules or patterns; He acts according to the need and situation of the moment--not according to our rules about how such things should occur.*

33. The Redemption of an Ethiopian Eunuch. (8:26-40)

With the revival in Samaria in full swing, an angel tells Philip that it is time for him to leave. This must have seemed to Philip like a bad idea; reason would cry out against leaving town, just when the Spirit is moving so mightily and things are going so well! But the Lord tells him to go south, through Jerusalem, to the coastal city of Gaza, in the former land of the Philistines. And Philip’s obedient, unquestioning, immediate response should be a standard for us all, for “He arose and went.”

Philip arrives in Gaza and a chariot appears, carrying an Ethiopian eunuch. He is a powerful man in the service of Candace, Queen of Ethiopia, having charge of the royal treasury. He has traveled to Jerusalem to worship, he is now returning to Ethiopia, and as he rides along he is reading from a scroll. The Holy Spirit tells Stephen to run, catch up with the chariot, and greet the man. In what must be one of the most bizarre cases of witnessing, teaching or preaching, Philip runs alongside the chariot, sees that the man is reading from Isaiah, and as he runs he asks the Eunuch if he understands what he is reading⁶⁹. The man replies that he

⁶⁹ We are not told how far Philip had to run during this unusual conversation, but he was probably breathing hard, making it difficult for him to speak.

needs someone to explain it, and invites Philip to join him in the chariot. Undoubtedly happy to do so, Philip joins him and catches his breath.

The man is reading from Isaiah 53:7-8, and he asks Philip who it is of whom the prophet wrote. Beginning there, Philip shows the man that the prophet wrote of Jesus the Messiah, and preaches the gospel to him. The eunuch is convinced and, seeing a body of water, he asks to be baptized. Philip replies that if the man believes, he may be baptized, and the man declares that he believes that “Jesus Christ is the Son of the Living God⁷⁰.” Philip is convinced, the chariot is stopped, Philip and the eunuch go down into the water and the eunuch is baptized. And, when they return to the chariot, in another miracle of disappearing, Philip is suddenly caught away in the Spirit, leaving the eunuch alone with his heart full of joy and his mind swirling. What a mind-staggering moment⁷¹!

Philip’s head must also be spinning, for instantly he is miles away in the coastal city of Azotus (the city’s name is the Greek form of Ashdod, another Philistine city, and the one where the Philistines suffered such misery from the captured Ark of the Covenant⁷²). Beginning there, Philip makes his way northward, preaching as he goes, until he reaches Caesarea. By this time, had there been no people to hear him along the way, he would probably have preached to the trees and the rocks!

NOTES:

a. God’s ways are truly above our ways and his thoughts above our thoughts⁷³. At times He will require things of us that make no sense to us; but we know and understand so little, and He knows and understands everything. Would He take the evangelist away from a city, just as revival is peaking, and send him to a strange place, just to reach one sincere man with a hungry heart? Absolutely! We see it here. and this man may have been the living seed that gave birth to the Ethiopian church.

b. Did the chariot stop for Philip to enter? Or did Philip run alongside the chariot and make a gymnastic entry like the cowboys in old western movies, boarding a moving train? It is fun to visualize such a boarding of the chariot, but the chariot was almost certainly stopped for him.

⁷⁰ The eunuch repeats, almost verbatim, Peter’s great confession of faith in Matt 16:16.

⁷¹ This matter of being suddenly caught away by the power of the Holy Spirit and appearing in a different place, is usually called being “translated.” This seems to have happened twice to the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek 3:14, 8:3). And, as we shall see, John the apostle will have this experience more than once as he receives the Lord’s prophetic messages in the Book of Revelation.

⁷² I Samuel 5.

⁷³ Isaiah 55:8-9; Romans 11:33-36.

c. Tradition holds that this Ethiopian eunuch was the means of taking the gospel to Ethiopia; and he probably was⁷⁴.

d. Verse 37, the only verse in the entire Bible that clearly states the principle of believer baptism, is omitted in the modern versions, all of which are based upon the Westcott-Hort Greek NT, which is based upon only 10% of the ancient manuscripts, primarily two decidedly incomplete documents, Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus, neither of which agrees completely with the other.

*The exception among modern versions, as usual, is the Amplified Bible, where its author, Mrs. Siewert, not only includes the verse, but **amplifies its meaning**⁷⁵. Being an intellectually honest scholar, and because she was working from a Westcott-Hort text which omits v 37, she italicized and footnoted it; but, as in the story of the woman taken in adultery (Jn 8:1-11 with footnote), she could not bring herself to omit it because, in her heart, she knew that it **should** be there. And, I might add, it **is** there in Textus Receptus (the traditional Greek text, based upon 90% of the ancient manuscripts and is thus called the "Majority Text"). Thus the verse is in the AV (KJV), which is based entirely on the Textus Receptus.*

In this regard, see the study guide to Mark 16, especially v 16.

34. The Conversion of Saul. (9:1-7)

The persecution that began with the stoning of Stephen is in full force, and it is spreading outward from Jerusalem. The young Pharisee Saul, who presided over the stoning of Stephen, has lost none of his furious zeal for the slaughter; and he seems to be the point man for the persecution.

Having apparently had news of a breakout of the Gospel in Damascus, Saul goes to Caiphas and asks for warrants to travel there, arrest the Christians, and bring them back to Jerusalem in chains for execution. With his posse of enforcers he travels toward Damascus; and, when he is almost there, the Lord has a surprise waiting for him.

Suddenly, at mid-day, a brilliant light from Heaven, brighter than the Sun, shines down upon the scene. Saul is struck down by the presence of God, as are the rest of his party. Then, having gained Saul's attention, an invisible Jesus speaks to him in Hebrew⁷⁶. Jesus asks why Saul is persecuting Him; and Saul, instantly

⁷⁴ This interesting possibility, that this Ethiopian eunuch (whom tradition has named as "Indich" or "Fudich,") was the beginning of the Ethiopian church, is called by Unger "without historical proof, but not improbable" (Unger's Bible Dictionary, p 327).

⁷⁵ Verse 37 in the AV (KJV) contains 27 words. In her Amplified Bible, Mrs. Siewert uses 59 words to translate the verse! Her rendering of v 37 is definitely worth reading; it demonstrates her reverence for the verse, and how strongly she felt about its importance. It will also give the reader a richer understanding of the verse.

⁷⁶ In this passage we are not told that all members of Paul's party were struck to the ground, or that Jesus spoke to Paul in Hebrew. These facts will be revealed in verse 14 of Chapter 26, as Paul pleads his case before King Agrippa.

humbled and polite, calls Jesus “Lord” (as in “sir”) and asks who He is. Jesus identifies Himself plainly: “I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest”; and He goes on to say that Saul, in fighting against the Church, cannot win. Like an ox “kicking against the pricks,” his efforts will be futile, and he will only hurt himself⁷⁷.

Immediately broken and submissive, Saul again calls Jesus “Lord,” (“Master”), but this time he uses the word with full knowledge concerning the Jesus whom he is addressing, and asks what Jesus would have him do. Jesus tells him to go on into Damascus and there he will be told what to do.

A pivotal event in human history has just taken place.

Meanwhile, Saul’s men have also been struck down, and have seen the brilliant light; but only Saul has heard Jesus speak; and only Saul is blinded.

NOTES:

a. At what point was Saul converted (redeemed, regenerated or, as Jesus expressed it to Nicodemus, “born again” [Jn 3:3-7])? In this exchange Saul twice calls Jesus “Lord” (in Greek, “kurios”)⁷⁸. The first time (v 5) he uses the word as we would say “sir”--as a courtesy. Then Jesus identifies Himself plainly and, although Saul again addresses Him as “kurios,” this time he knows to Whom he is speaking. And, in so addressing Jesus, in complete submission, Saul is calling Him, “my Lord and Master.” And so it appears that between Saul’s first addressing Jesus as “Lord” in v 5, and again addressing Him as “Lord” in v 6, Saul has been born again; for no one “can say that Jesus is Lord, but by [the inspiration of] the Holy Ghost” (I Cor 12:3).

Saul is yet far from understanding, and his mind will need renewing; but it seems clear that he definitely knows now that Jesus is the Messiah, and that he has surrendered his life to Him, lying there, blind, completely broken and humbled, on the Damascus road.

b. Saul was obviously not in the least touched by the truth or sweetness of Stephen’s testimony, nor by the Christ-like way in which Stephen accepted and faced his terrible execution. No--it took a knockout punch from the Lord to get Saul’s attention; and so it is with many of us.

35. The Commission of Ananias. (9:8-16)

⁷⁷ An ox goad (“the pricks”) was a heavy wooden pole or thick board,, with nail points protruding forward; it was rigged behind the ox in harness, to discourage kicking.

⁷⁸ For a refresher concerning the dual meaning of this word see “**The Three Basic Names of God: No Longer; Kurios**” in the Introduction to the New Testament.

As a result of his encounter with the risen Jesus, Saul is blind; but obediently and, with the help of his men, he travels on into Damascus. There, he neither eats nor drinks for the next three days⁷⁹.

Then the Lord appears to a disciple in Damascus whose name is Ananias. He tells Ananias to go to the house of one Judas, in the street called Straight, and ask for Saul of Tarsus. He says that this Saul is praying, and has seen in a vision a man named Ananias, coming to him and laying his hands on him, that he might receive his sight. Ananias, certain that there is a serious mistake here, objects. He points out the obvious: that this Saul has persecuted the saints at Jerusalem, and that he has come with warrants to arrest the saints in Damascus and take them to Jerusalem (to be executed)⁸⁰. But Jesus tells Ananias to go, and that Saul is expecting him, for he has seen Ananias in a vision, coming to pray for him. He says that He has chosen Saul to take the gospel to the gentiles, to kings, and the children of Israel. He will also, says Jesus, show Saul how he will suffer for his faith.

36. The Preparation of Saul for His New Life. (9:17-19)

In obedience, Ananias goes to the house where Saul is staying (and praying). He greets Saul as “Brother Saul,” lays his hands on him and tells him that Jesus has sent him to Saul so that he might recover his sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost. As Ananias prays, Saul’s vision returns, he is filled with the Holy Spirit and, without delay, he is baptized⁸¹. He eats, is strengthened, and spends several days with the Damascus Christians, learning from them and adjusting to his new life. His posse of enforcers apparently returns to Jerusalem, but we are told nothing of them, or of Judas, Saul’s host.

Saul of Tarsus seems to have been the recipient of a personalized, one-man, Holy Ghost revival.

NOTES:

a. The preparation of both Saul and Ananias for their meeting is interestingly elaborate. For Saul to be able to change so abruptly, from Christian hater and destroyer to Christian brother, and for Ananias to be able to go and pray for the chief destroyer of Christians, required radical adjustments. Both of these radical adjustments required radical preparation, in the form of personal visitations to both men by the risen Jesus, and a vision that Saul received about the event--one

⁷⁹ As a Pharisee, Saul has fasted often, and this fast may have been just a natural response to what he has experienced. Or, as suggested by Unger, “...his remorse [was] so piercing and deep, that during this time he neither ate nor drank” (Unger's Bible Dictionary, “Paul,” p 831).

⁸⁰ Interestingly, this news has reached the Christians in Damascus before Saul’s arrival.

⁸¹ At what point Saul is filled with the Holy Ghost is not made clear; but the wording of vv 17-18 strongly suggests that Saul received the Holy Spirit filling (baptism) when Ananias prayed for him.

that Ananias fulfilled as he obediently went to the house of Judas and prayed for the previously feared and hated Saul, the new Christian.

b. Notice that, in Saul's coming to the Lord, the sequence of events is not the norm, and yet the end result is the same: Saul becomes a born-again, Spirit-filled, water baptized believer, ready for service to the Kingdom.

He is apparently born again on the Damascus Road for, knowing Whom he is addressing, he calls Jesus "Lord" (v 6); also, when addressing Saul, whom he has never met, Ananias calls him "brother Saul." Then, as Ananias prays, Saul is healed of blindness and filled with the Holy Spirit (v 17); and, finally, as the wording suggests, he is baptized in water (v 18).

37. Saul's Escape from Damascus. (9:20-31)

After only a few days of getting acquainted with the Damascus Christians, Saul begins to visit the synagogues in the city, proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah. Those to whom he preaches are amazed at the role reversal, and are shocked into inactivity. In time, however, as Saul consistently proves the divinity and validity of Jesus as Messiah, the Jews, unable to handle it, make plans to kill him⁸². They watch all the gates in the city wall, day and night; but he escapes, being let down from the wall at night in a large basket.

After three years in Arabia and Damascus, he returns to Jerusalem, filled with joy and zeal, but the Christians there are afraid of him; they think Saul the persecutor is trying to deceive them⁸³. At this point Barnabas, believing his story, takes Saul to meet the apostles; he meets only Peter and remains with him for 15 days; during this time he also meets James, the Lord's half-brother⁸⁴. He is accepted, and he lives freely ("coming in and going out"), for a short time, among the Jerusalem Christians. He preaches frequently, particularly to the Hellenists (Greek-speaking Jews), convincingly making his case that Jesus is the Messiah. The Hellenist Jews can't win the debate so, of course, they make plans to kill him.

Learning of this plan to kill Saul, the disciples escort him to Caesarea, and from there send him to Tarsus, Saul's home town. There then follows a period of rest from persecution; and the churches in Judaea, Samaria and Galilee grow and prosper.

NOTE: *Tarsus has an interesting history. Rome made it the capital of Cilicia (a coastal region of Syria), exempted it from imperial taxation, and granted its citizens Roman citizenship. It became a center of culture and learning on a level*

⁸² This man becomes a spiritual lightning rod for trouble; for the rest of his life he will preach the truth, the truth will offend certain of his listeners, and they will try to kill him.

⁸³ Concerning Saul's three years in Arabia and Syria, see Galatians 1:11-18.

⁸⁴ Galatians 1:19. It is possible--even likely--that Barnabas had been to Damascus, met Saul and heard him preach, and had gotten to know him there.

with Athens and Alexandria. Cleopatra is believed by some ancient historians to have traveled there in disguise, to rendezvous with her lover Marc Antony. Saul (who will become Paul) was very proud to be a native citizen of Tarsus and to have been born a Roman citizen⁸⁵.

38. The Healing of Aeneus and Tabitha. (9:32-43)

Meanwhile Peter, traveling widely, comes to Lydda, about 10 miles southeast of the seaport Joppa⁸⁶. There he encounters one Aeneus, a paralytic who has been bed-ridden for eight years. Without preamble, Peter tells him to arise and make his bed, for Jesus the Christ has made him whole. Aeneus immediately gets up, healed, and he becomes a sensation. All who see him, in Lydda and the surrounding Plain of Saron (Sharon), are convinced of the gospel and turn to the Lord⁸⁷.

Meanwhile, at Joppa, 10 miles away on the coast, a Christian woman named Tabitha has sickened and died⁸⁸. She is a woman greatly admired for her generosity and good deeds. Hearing that Peter is at Lydda, the disciples at Joppa send for him to come there. Arriving at the upper chamber in Joppa where the body lies, prepared for burial, Peter finds grieving widows, who show him the garments that Tabitha has made for them. Peter sends the women out of the room, prays, and then commands Tabitha to arise. She opens her eyes, sees Peter, and sits up. Nothing is recorded concerning what was said by Peter and Tabitha, but he takes her by the hand, helps her up and presents her, alive, to the mourners. We can only imagine the rejoicing. Word of the miracle spreads all over Joppa, many turn to the Lord, and Peter remains in Joppa for many days, lodging with a Tanner named Simon.

* * * * *

Peter and Cornelius: a Pivotal Moment in Church History

Chapters 10 and 11 are two of the most important chapters in the entire Bible. In these chapters it is made clear that the gospel, God's plan for the redemption of lost and sinful man, is not only for the Jewish nation, and for the mongrelized, semi-Jewish, people of Samaria, but for all of mankind. One would think that this

⁸⁵ We shall see this in Acts 21:39 and 22:25-28.

⁸⁶ In the Old Testament it is called Lod (I Chron 8:12, et al); today it is called Ludd.

⁸⁷ The text states, "all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron (Sharon), saw [Aeneus] and turned to the Lord." Saron (Sharon) is a large, fertile plain including Lydda, Joppa and Caesarea. Could this mean that every person in the entire area came to the Lord? It seems unlikely, and v 42 tells us that it does not ("many [not everyone] believed in the Lord").

⁸⁸ Tabitha (Aramaic for "female gazelle"), probably a Greek Christian, was also known as "Dorcas," a Greek term of endearment, also meaning "graceful, as in the movements of a gazelle."

had been settled by the visit of Nicodemus to Jesus in John 3, when Jesus said that the New Birth was for "whosoever." If not then, when, as Paul relates in Galatians 2:9, Paul went, for the second time, to see the apostles in Jerusalem (after preaching to Gentiles for 14 years), and it was decided that Peter would evangelize the Jews and Paul the Gentiles. But the original Church was a Jewish church, and attitudes changed slowly.

Until Peter walked into the home of Cornelius, a Roman Centurion with a heart for God, and preached, Peter had never entered a Gentile home (it was against the Jewish law), let alone preached to Gentiles. Until this improbable event, what Peter did was unthinkable, as we shall see vividly illustrated in Chapter 11.

The idea was almost as uncomfortable for Cornelius as it was unthinkable for Peter, and it required a visit by an angel, and elaborate works of the Holy Spirit, in the form of visions and carefully timed, reassuring directions, to bring about the momentous meeting. The entire Jewish Church and the entire Lost World met in that house on that historic day; and, since that day, the World has never been the same.

Even after the events of Chapters 10 and 11, there was confusion and disharmony over the matter of Gentiles in the Church. Even after the matter was settled administratively and officially by the council of apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-32), Judaizers followed Paul, Barnabas Silas and the others on their evangelistic journeys, telling the Gentile converts that they must be circumcised and obey the Law, causing confusion among the Gentiles and vexation for the evangelists.

But the breakthrough, leading ultimately to a unified Church, took place in the home of a God-seeking Roman centurian.

* * * * *

39. An Angel Visits A Godly Centurion. (10:1-8)

There is, dwelling in the seaport city of Caesaria, a Roman centurion named Cornelius. He is an officer of "the Italian band," a unit of volunteers from Italy on special assignment for Emperor Augustus⁸⁹. Cornelius is a gentile with a desire to know and serve the God of the Jews; he is a proselyte, a gentile who studies the Jewish religion and seeks to be admitted into Jewish worship. He is a pious, admirable man, one who not only seeks to know God, but also leads his family and servants to follow his example. He is a man of prayer, and is generous in giving to help the poor and needy. An angel visits him in a vision, tells him that his

⁸⁹ A centurion commanded a "century," a unit of about 100 soldiers. Three such centuries comprised a cohort ("band"), a tenth of a Roman legion. These strengths of Roman Army units varied from time to time.

prayers and good works are pleasing to God, and directs him to send for a man in Joppa named Simon, whose surname is Peter. He will be found there in the seaside home of one Simon, a tanner. This Simon Peter, says the angel, will tell Cornelius what to do. Simon selects two servants and one of his soldiers (probably to protect the messengers), briefs them and sends them to Joppa for Peter.

NOTE: The angel appears to Cornelius "evidently at about the ninth hour." The word "evidently" as used here does not mean "maybe," or equivocate in any way; it means "clearly," or "openly," without doubt. It is interesting that the angel appears to Cornelius "at about the 9th hour"; this is 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon, the hour at which Jesus cried out "It is finished" and gave up the ghost. Is this significant? We probably cannot know in what way; but everything in the Bible is significant, and even the timing of this momentous event did not "just happen."

40. Peter's Vision of Unclean Animals. (10:9-22)

The next day, as the messengers and the soldier approach Joppa, Peter goes up on the housetop to pray; it is about noon. He becomes very hungry, and while food is being prepared he falls into a trance and sees a vision. He sees something like a great sheet, knit (suspended) by the four corners. It is filled with all sorts of animals which, by Levitical Law, are unclean and are not to be eaten. A voice tells Peter to kill and eat these unclean animals, but he is appalled; he objects, saying that he has never eaten anything that is ceremonially unclean. The voice corrects Peter, saying that he is not to call unclean "that which God has cleansed." This vision is repeated two times⁹⁰. While Peter wonders what this vision means, the messengers arrive at the gate, asking for him⁹¹. The Holy Spirit tells Peter to greet these men and go with them, for they are sent by Him. Peter asks them why they have come, and they explain that Cornelius desires that Peter come to his home and preach.

41. Peter and Friends Go to Meet Cornelius. (10:23-33)

Peter invites the messengers to come in, they spend the night there, and the following day they depart for Caesarea with Peter and some of the disciples at Joppa⁹². They arrive the following day at the house of Cornelius to find him and a crowd of his friends and relatives waiting. Cornelius rushes to meet him and falls at Peter's feet, but Peter raises him up, corrects him, and they talk. Then Peter, his

⁹⁰ It seems to please God, who is Himself triune, to do things in threes.

⁹¹ The Holy Spirit is orchestrating this entire affair; and, as usual, the timing is perfect.

⁹² Peter wisely took some fellow Christians with him. In addition to the danger of traveling, he knew that by entering the home of a Gentile, if this were not of God, he could be committing a grave error; for it would be a violation of the Levitical law, and Jesus had told them to go first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Wisdom called for the presence of other Christians as witnesses.

companions, and Cornelius enter the house to greet the assembled crowd. Peter tells them that a Jew is not to enter the home or have fellowship with Gentiles, but then explains how God has shown him not to call any man unclean. Then he asks why Cornelius has sent for him, and Cornelius tells him of his visit by an angel.

42. Peter Begins to Preach (But Doesn't Get to Finish). (10:33-48)

Peter opens by saying that he sees clearly that God is not a respecter of persons; rather, Peter says, God will accept those who seek Him among all nations. Then he outlines the coming of Jesus, his baptism by John, his ministry of teaching, healing and liberating those in bondage. He tells the assembled listeners how Jesus was arrested, put to death, and resurrected. He tells them how the risen Jesus appeared to them after the resurrection, undeniably alive, eating and drinking with them. He says that Jesus will someday judge the quick and the dead, and then he begins to explain how the prophets of old spoke of Jesus.

As Peter warms to his preaching, but is far from finished, the Holy Spirit falls on all of the Gentile listeners! The Jewish Christians are amazed (and convinced) because these newly born Gentile Christians are all speaking in tongues and magnifying God⁹³! We must admire Peter's flexibility, for the Lord has abruptly interrupted his preaching, and he hasn't yet given the altar call; yet he quickly catches up with his former listeners, acknowledges that these Gentile seekers have indeed received the gift of the Holy Ghost, in the same way that he and the other Jewish Christians had received, and he commands that they be baptized in water.

These new, Gentile, Christians are baptized, and Peter stays with them for several days, undoubtedly to instruct them and probably to help them organize as a church. A significant turning point in human history has been reached: the good news of Jesus is not just for the Jews, but for everyone! But the Jews in Jerusalem are not going to be pleased.

***NOTE:** In v 38 Peter clarifies an extremely important point--one that we should stop and be sure that we understand. It is that Jesus, during his earthly ministry, did not preach with supernatural power, and perform miracles to confirm his preaching, because He was (and is) God. Rather, Peter makes clear, He did these things because He was anointed with "the Holy Ghost and power." And then Peter adds five highly significant words of further clarification: he explains, "...for God was **with** him." Remember that Peter, in his famous preaching at Pentecost, identified the Lord as "Jesus of Nazareth, **a man** approved by God" (v 22), and then builds the case to declare Him also "both Lord and Christ." It is extremely important, as we try to understand all this, to remember that Jesus did not perform miracles until He was 30 years old; prior to that time He had grown to manhood*

⁹³ Compare with Acts 2:4-11.

as a perfectly normal carpenter (except for the fact that He was sinless). There is nothing in Scripture, nor in the Apocrypha, even to suggest that Jesus ever performed a miracle prior to that pivotal day in the River Jordan when the Holy Spirit descended, and remained, on Him. If this was not the moment when, as Peter said, He was “anointed with the Holy Ghost and power,” I don’t know of a better suggestion⁹⁴.

Now, this takes us back to Jn 14:12, which I call “the most outrageous verse in the Bible.” There Jesus said that believers--you and I (“he that believeth on me”) --will do the same things in ministry that He had done, and even “greater things,” because He would return to the Father, and send the Holy Spirit. It also takes us back to the sending out of the 12 apostles, two-by-two, to preach and heal (Matt 10:5-8, Mk 6:7-13, Lk 9:1-6), and to the later sending out of the “other 70” disciples to do the same things (Lk 10:1-9). These 82 disciples apparently did not retain this power to preach with the anointing, heal, raise the dead and cast out demons. Rather, it seems clear, their anointing to do such things was temporary, for Jesus made it clear that, after his departure, they should all postpone ministry, waiting at Jerusalem until they were permanently empowered by the Holy Spirit (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:8).

*Thus, it seems, it was not unreasonable for Jesus to expect us to proclaim the gospel in power, confirming the truth of it with miracles of healing, deliverance, etc., for He had done these things, not as God, but as a man, “anointed with the Holy Ghost and power”; and He was able to go on doing these things because “God was **with** Him.” Although it is daunting to think that we should do all the things that Jesus did, it seems not unreasonable for Him to expect it of us. For some thoughts about those “greater things” see the study guide to Jn 14:7-14.*

43. Peter Returns to Angry Criticism. (11:1-18)

Peter returns to Jerusalem, and the news of the Gentile ministry has preceded him. There is a group of Jewish Christians within the church there who feel strongly that in order to be a Christian one must also be an observant, religious Jew. These men “of the circumcision” confront Peter for even going into the house of Gentiles and eating with them, let alone baptizing them. Peter responds, reciting the events that led up to the baptism, and tells them that, until the Spirit fell upon the household of Cornelius he, also, believed it would be wrong to baptize the Gentiles. But, he says, when he saw the Holy Spirit fall on them, “as on us at the beginning,” he remembered the words of Jesus just before his ascension to Heaven. He quotes the Lord’s statement as to John’s baptizing in

⁹⁴ There are some charming fables concerning miracles performed by Jesus as a child, such as turning rocks into birds, to amuse his playmates; but they are just that--fables, not Scripture.

water, and his promise that they, in contrast, would be baptized “with the Holy Ghost⁹⁵.” Hearing this they believe Peter’s words and praise God for granting also to the Gentiles “repentance unto life.”

44. The Disciples Are Called “Christians.” (11:19-26)

While the believers at Jerusalem are adjusting to what happened at Caesaria in the home of Cornelius, other Jewish Christians, scattered by the first persecution involving the martyrdom of Stephen, are carrying the gospel as far away as Antioch in Syria and the Island of Cyprus, preaching only to the Jews⁹⁶. Great numbers turn to the Lord, word of this reaches the church at Jerusalem, and they send Barnabas, a native of Cyprus and a Levite, to look into it. He travels as far as Antioch in Syria, finds wonderful revival there, and travels on to Tarsus, looking for Saul. Finding him, Barnabas returns to Antioch, bringing Saul; there, at Antioch, the two of them remain with the church for a year, teaching. It is here in Antioch, during this time, that the disciples are first called “Christians.”

45. James is Martyred and Peter Is Arrested. (12:1-4)

At this time King Herod begins actively to persecute the Church; he has the apostle James arrested and beheaded⁹⁷. Seeing that this pleases the Jewish leaders, he has Peter also arrested and put in prison with elaborate security⁹⁸! Four quaternions of Roman soldiers are assigned to guard him. This allows for one quaternion (a group of four soldiers) to guard Peter during each of the four watches, of three hours each. During the night two of the soldiers will sleep in the cell, chained to Peter on either side, and the other two will stand watch outside the door. Herod is taking no chances on Peter’s escaping; but he doesn’t want to execute him until after Passover, apparently for fear of the people.

NOTE: In verse 4 the word rendered “Easter” is, in Greek, “pascha,” Aramaic for “Passover,” derived from the Hebrew “Pesach.” If I could change only one word in the KJV, it would be this one. “Easter” is derived from the name of the Saxon goddess of Spring and fertility (i.e. sex), Eastre. The Babylonians called her Ishtar, and the Syrians called her Astarte (in the OT she is Ashtoreth). Jerome, in his Latin Vulgate, the World’s first complete Bible (405 AD), used

⁹⁵ Acts 1:5.

⁹⁶ There were 16 towns and cities in the Roman world called Antioch (named for Antiochus, a Syrian King), but this one was the most important. Commercially, it was the 3rd greatest city in the Roman Empire, after Rome and Alexandria. It was on the Orontes River in Syria, 15 miles upstream from the northeastern tip of the Mediterranean.

⁹⁷ This is James the brother of John, son of Zebedee and, with Peter and John, he was one of Jesus’ inner circle. This Herod is Herod Agrippa, grandson of Herod the Great, who ordered the slaughter of the innocents, and nephew of Herod Antipas, who had John the Baptist beheaded. For more on the Herods see “The Powerful but Highly Dysfunctional Herodian Family” in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

⁹⁸ These extreme security measures were apparently taken because of Peter’s previous miraculous escape, with John (Acts 5:17-20).

“pascha” (Passover), as do the New King James Version and most of the modern translations in use today.

We must remember that the early Church continued for centuries to observe Passover according to the Hebrew calendar. By the 5th Century AD some Bishoprics were still following the Hebrew calendar for the Passover, including celebration of the Resurrection, but calling it “Easter,” apparently in an effort to compromise with the pagan festival which occurred about the same time. The process of transition from celebrating Passover, based on the Hebrew calendar, and Holy Week climaxed by Easter Sunday, based on the Gregorian calendar, was long, gradual, cloudy and complex. It is probably impossible to know exact times when changes in the observances took place, and they did not take place at the same times all over the World. By Elizabethan times however, when the Authorized (King James) Version was translated, the Hebrew calendar was abandoned for the Gregorian calendar, and celebration of Holy Week, with Easter Sunday as its climax, was well established. And, regrettably, Passover no longer had meaning for most Christians.

Nevertheless, no matter whose calendar we may choose to follow, it is greatly regrettable that here, in Acts 12:4 “Easter” was chosen, when the Greek is, clearly, “Passover.” And it is even more regrettable that the Church, with few exceptions, has embraced not only Easter’s pagan name, but also some of its pagan practices.

46. Another Miraculous Escape for Peter. (12:5-17)

The Christians are praying without ceasing for Peter’s release and, in that night, an angel appears. Peter is sleeping and the angel nudges (or kicks) him in the ribs to wake him. The angel pulls Peter to his feet and the chains fall from him; this should wake the guards, but they appear to be supernaturally sedated. The angel tells Peter to “gird” himself (prepare to move quickly), put on his sandals and robe, and follow him; Peter obeys, but is wondering if it is a dream. They pass by the two soldiers outside the door, then two more guard posts without interference, as if they are invisible. When they reach the locked iron gate which leads to the city, it spontaneously opens before them and they walk out into the street. Before they pass the next street the angel vanishes without a word, and Peter is left standing in the street alone. Realizing that all of this is real, and not a dream or vision, he heads for the house of Mary, mother of John Mark, where many of the believers are gathered, conducting a prayer vigil for him⁹⁹.

Inside the house a young girl named Rhoda hears Peter knocking on the door and runs to it. She recognizes Peter’s voice but is so excited that she forgets to open

⁹⁹ This John Mark is the one who will become Peter’s companion and the human author of the Gospel of Mark.

the door, runs to the group and tells them that he is there. The rest of the believers don't believe the girl but as Peter continues to knock and call to them they finally let him in. He tells them what has happened, and then directs some of them to go report what has happened "to James and to the brethren¹⁰⁰." With this, apparently fearing that the authorities will look for him at Mary's home, he goes somewhere else to spend the rest of the night.

47. The Ignominious End of Herod Agrippa. (12:18-25)

With the coming of the new day there is, understandably, a lot of unhappy excitement when the guards wake to find Peter gone and his chains opened.¹⁰¹ Herod sends for Peter, learns that he has (literally) disappeared, asks a few questions and then commands that the guards be put to death. Apparently unwilling to stay any longer in Jerusalem, where everything seems to go wrong for him, he travels to his palace in Caesarea. There, still grumbling, his anger is directed at the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they, needing his protection and provision, make peace with him through Blastus, the king's chamberlain (personal servant) who has great influence with Herod.

Herod, apparently feeling the need of a boost in his self-esteem, announces a day for making a speech. On the appointed day he dresses in his best regal garments, assumes his throne and delivers an oration. The people applaud and praise him, declaring that his is the voice of a god, not a mere man. Nero-like, he enjoys their praise, but it is his last mistake. For accepting praise and worship as a god, an angel strikes him down before the crowd for his arrogant blasphemy, he is "eaten of worms," and dies¹⁰².

Meanwhile, Barnabas and Saul return to Antioch, taking with them young John Mark, Mary's son. We will learn later that John Mark is also Barnabas' nephew¹⁰³.

***NOTE:** According to Josephus, Herod Agrippa appeared in a glorious robe made of silver, and the early morning sunlight caused the robe to have a brilliant glow, striking the people with awe and wonder, causing them to cry out that Agrippa was a god. Josephus, in his understated way, added that this flattery was "though not for his good." Agrippa, according to Josephus, looked up, saw an owl which was an omen of bad things, and was immediately smitten with an extremely painful illness "in his belly" which killed him, after five days of agonizing pain¹⁰⁴.*

¹⁰⁰ By now, it seems, James, the brother of Jesus, is already being looked upon as the leader of the Jerusalem church.

¹⁰¹ "no small stir" in v 18, describing the reaction of the guards when they found Peter gone, is definitely an understatement!

¹⁰² He was probably supernaturally infected with virulent parasites.

¹⁰³ Colossians 4:10.

¹⁰⁴ Josephus, Antiquities 19.8.2.

48. The Ordination of Barnabas and Saul. (13:1-3)

The church at Antioch is quickly becoming important, with prophets and teachers there. Besides Barnabas, the prophets and teachers included a black man named Simeon Niger, Manaean, who had been reared in the palace with Herod, and one Lucius from Cyrene¹⁰⁵. The Holy Spirit directs these leaders at Antioch to ordain Barnabas and Saul as apostles¹⁰⁶. After a time of fasting and prayer, the leaders lay hands on them and send them out. This evangelistic journey will come to be known as Paul's first missionary journey.

NOTES:

a. From this point to 21:3, the Book of Acts records the three "missionary journeys" of Paul and his associates. Many unfamiliar place names will appear, and it can be difficult to follow and visualize the routes that they took and where they were. The third missionary journey can be particularly difficult because portions of it are unknown.

In the study of these journeys a good map is extremely helpful, if not essential. With a good map, Unger's Bible Dictionary and, at times, references to the internet, it will be much easier to visualize the routes and places mentioned in the journeys. To compound the problem, the maps in different Bibles are not all drawn in the same degree of detail and, in some places, they do not agree; I recommend the maps in Dr. Henry Morris's New Defender's Study Bible, although there may well be better ones.

b. Today, except in Pentecostal and Charismatic circles, the word "apostolic" has fallen out of contemporary use; even the journeys of Paul are referred to, in commentaries, teaching, preaching and on Bible maps, as his three "missionary journeys." But what was he doing on those three journeys? He was traveling to places where the gospel of Christ had not reached, declaring it, and founding churches there (today it is called "church planting"). Since the Greek word for "apostle" is "apostolos," meaning one who is sent, and since present day missionaries are "sent out" (by sending agencies, or by personal nudging by the Holy Spirit), it seems to me that those contemporary missionaries who are sent out to proclaim the gospel where it isn't already being declared, and establish churches there, have apostolic ministries (although most would shrink from this identity for themselves). To avoid confusion, however, from this point onward we will use the commonly used term, "missionary journeys."

49. The First Journey--Saul Becomes Paul on the Island of Cyprus. (13:4-12)

¹⁰⁵ (a) Manaean is the Greek form of the Hebrew name, "Menahem."

(b) Cyrene was a Greek city on the north coast of Africa. There was a Cyrenian presence in Jerusalem (Acts 6:9), and one Simon of Cyrene was forced to assist Jesus in carrying his cross (Matt 27:32).

¹⁰⁶ See in this regard Acts 14:14.

Barnabas and Saul, sent forth by the Holy Spirit, go southward from Antioch, into the coastal region of Seleucia, accompanied by young John Mark, Barnabas' nephew¹⁰⁷. From there they take ship to the island of Cyprus and land at Salamis, where they preach in the synagogues¹⁰⁸. From Salamis they travel to Paphos, the seaport capital of Cyprus, where they find a sorcerer, a Jew named Bar-jesus, who is also called "Elymas" (the wise, or knowing, one). This wicked, demonized man has attached himself to the Roman deputy (proconsul) of Cyprus, Sergius Paulus¹⁰⁹. Sergius Paulus, a sincere seeker of truth, has allowed this Elymas to deceive him with his apparent supernatural knowledge and spiritual power¹¹⁰.

Hearing of their presence, Sergius Paulus sends for Barnabas and Saul, desiring to hear what they are proclaiming; but Elymas opposes them, seeking to protect his position of influence with Sergius Paulus. At this point, this self-proclaimed sorcerer meets much more than his match in a furious Saul. Calling him a "child of the Devil" and the "enemy of all righteousness," Saul strikes him blind. Suddenly, this arrogant manipulator of the island's ruler is de-fanged and helpless, unable even to see the Sun, groping around, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Sergius Paulus is astonished, and becomes a believer on the spot.

NOTES:

a. In v 12 the word "doctrine" (Greek "didache") means teaching. It can mean that which is taught, or the act of teaching. Here, however, it is equated with power, or the demonstrated result of what is being proclaimed.

b. At this point (v 9), without explanation, Saul's name becomes Paul (Paulus); it is simply the Greek form of the Hebrew name, Saul. Perhaps it is because he and Barnabas will henceforth be ministering primarily to Gentiles. Some students of this matter believe that the name "Paul" was given to him as an honor for leading the Roman proconsul, Sergius Paulus to faith in Christ. At any rate, "Paul" is the name he would use for the rest of his life; perhaps only God knows why.

c. Also, from this point onward, Paul seems to have become the leader; for he and Barnabas are spoken of as "Paul and Barnabas," rather than "Barnabas and Saul" as before; and, in v 13, we read of "Paul and his company." Prior to this, Barnabas has been the leader; it was he who reached out to Saul, vouched for him, and introduced him to the other Christians. We are not told what became of

¹⁰⁷ Concerning the word "nephew" see explanatory **NOTE a.** following the study guide to Colossians 4:7-16.

¹⁰⁸ The use of "synagogues" in the plural suggests that there were many Jews at Salamis.

¹⁰⁹ As proconsul, Sergius Paulus occupied essentially the same position on the island of Cyprus as did Pontius Pilate over the region of Judaea. Roman coins and other inscriptions have been found there, bearing his name and title; the Bible wins again.

¹¹⁰ We might compare this Elymas with Rasputin, the wicked, demonized priest who held great power over the deceived family of the Russian Czar Nicholas. When the Czar and his family were murdered by the Bolshevics, his wife and children were wearing images of Rasputin around their necks.

Elymas, except that his blindness was apparently temporary (“for a season”), in order to get his attention. If he had any intelligence at all, he followed his Roman master as a disciple of Jesus.

50. John Mark Turns Back. (13:13-15)

From Paphos Paul and his company take ship and sail north to the mainland of Asia Minor. They land at Perga, the capital of Pamphilia, seven miles up the Cestrus River. At this point, for reasons not recorded, John Mark turns back, leaving Paul and Barnabas, and returns to Jerusalem. From Perga, Paul and Barnabas go northward, to Antioch in Pisidia¹¹¹. They go into the synagogue on the weekly Sabbath, and are invited to speak.

NOTES:

a. In the following 26 verses Paul summarizes Jewish history, from the captivity in Egypt to the ministry, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, in much the same way that Stephen had done before the Sanhedrin¹¹². He ends with a warning from Habakkuk (Hab 1:5) about rejecting the Messiah (vv 40-41); but the Jews in the synagogue are apparently not impressed, for they get up and leave.

*b. Verse 33, where Paul quotes from “the second Psalm,” is **the only place in the Bible** where a specific portion (chapter or verse) of Scripture is cited. Of course, this is not surprising in that, at that time, Psalms was the only book divided into what we today call chapters. The rest of the Bible wasn’t divided into chapters until the beginning of the 13th Century; and there were no verse divisions in the Bible for another 300-plus years¹¹³.*

51. The Gentiles Receive the Gospel Gladly. (13:42-52)

The Jews, having no ears to hear Paul, have left the synagogue¹¹⁴. On the other hand, the Gentiles present are definitely interested, and want to hear more; they ask Paul and Barnabas to come back the following week and tell them more¹¹⁵. After the service ends the Gentiles and some of the Jews follow Paul and Barnabas, listening to them, and are persuaded of the truth of what they say. But trouble is brewing.

The following Sabbath day almost the entire population comes to hear the gospel; but now the unmoved Jews, motivated by envy and malice, oppose and

¹¹¹ This city is one of the 16 of that time named Antioch, for a Persian king, Antiochus. It is hundreds of miles from the Antioch from which they had begun their evangelistic journey.

¹¹² Acts Chapter 7.

¹¹³ The Bible was first divided into chapters by Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury, about 1200 AD. The verse divisions were the work of Stephanus in his Greek NT (“Textus Receptus”), completed in 1551. The first entire Bible to be divided into verses was also the work of Stephanus, who divided Jerome’s Latin Vulgate into verses.

¹¹⁴ In v 42, the modern versions omit the fact that the Jews left the synagogue, leaving Paul, Barnabas and the Gentiles there. This fact is there, however, in the literal Greek of the Textus Receptus.

¹¹⁵ These Gentiles are proselytes--Gentiles who desire to learn and follow the Jewish religion.

speak against them. Paul and Barnabas reply that it was necessary to preach first to the Jews but, since they have rejected the truth, they will preach to the Gentiles¹¹⁶. This they do, with great success. The people throughout the region receive the truth with joy, are filled with the Holy Ghost and glorify God. The hostile Jews, however, stir up opposition by powerful people and Paul and Barnabas are deported. They shake off the dust of their feet against their persecutors (an insulting gesture of dismissal and condemnation), and head for Iconium¹¹⁷.

NOTE: The wording of v 48 suggests what Saint Augustine called “the elect” (as opposed to “the non-elect”), the heart of the doctrine of predestination, fundamental to Presbyterian/Reformed theology. The key to this divisive matter, however, may be found, it seems to me, in Romans 8:28-30, with which we will deal in the study of Romans.

52. A Lame Man Is Healed at Lystra. (14:1-10)

At Iconium Paul and Barnabas have great success among both Jews and Gentiles (called Greeks here), in spite of opposition by unbelieving Jews. They stay there for a long time, until plans are made to stone them. Learning of this, they flee Iconium and go to Lystra in the province of Lycaonia. In Lystra there is a crippled man who has never walked; and, while listening to Paul, the man is called out by Paul and instantly healed. Like the man healed by Peter at the Gate Beautiful (Chapter 3), the man doesn't just walk; he goes walking and leaping, undoubtedly from joy. This miracle of healing will cause serious trouble--in fact, a matter of life and death.

53. Paul Is Stoned at Lystra. (14:11-20)

The Pagans, seeing this great miracle, cry out, in the language of Lycaonia, that the gods have come down in the form of men--that Paul is Mercury and Barnabas is Zeus (Jupiter), and things begin to get out of hand. The priest of the temple of Zeus, which is outside the city gate, hurries into town with oxen and garlands of flowers and leaves, preparing to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas. Horrified at the thought of what was about to happen, the two apostles tear their garments and run in among the excited crowd, declaring truth, and urging them to honor only the true and living God. The crowd is undecided, still wanting to worship Paul and Barnabas, when hostile Jews arrive. These men have followed Paul and Barnabas from Antioch and Iconium, for the purpose of making trouble for them, and this they surely do. They shout accusations against Paul and Barnabas; and the local pagans, who had been determined a short while before to worship the

¹¹⁶ Matthew 10:5-6; Rom 1:16, 2:10.

¹¹⁷ This shaking the dust off the feet was prescribed by Jesus when sending out the twelve to minister without him and, later, to the “other seventy” disciples whom He sent out with the same instructions (Matthew 10:14; Lk 10:11).

apostles, suddenly become furious. They stone Paul, drag his body outside the city, and leave him for dead. The local (new) Christians surround Paul (undoubtedly praying) and he rises up, miraculously healed¹¹⁸! They all go back into the town, and we must wonder why they aren't attacked again when they do. The following day, Paul and Barnabas leave Lystra and go to Derbe.

NOTE: How fickle and easily manipulated is unthinking man; and how quickly one can go from his exalted hero to his despised enemy. This is an extreme example of this sad fact.

54. Back to Antioch, from Where They Had Started. (14:21-28)

After making and instructing many disciples in Derbe, Paul and Barnabas reverse their course. Beginning in Derbe, they go back through Lystra, Iconium and Antioch of Pisidia, confirming the new believers in each place, exhorting them to be faithful and warning them that they will experience much tribulation. When they have ordained elders in each church which they had established in those places, they continue to retrace their journey, back to Perga, thence to Attalia¹¹⁹. From Attalia they sail directly back to Seleucia, this time bypassing Cyprus. From Attalia they travel overland back to Antioch of Syria, where their journey had begun. There, reunited with their home church, they report all that they had experienced, and stay with them for a long time.

NOTE: What we are seeing here is extremely significant; it is the birth of the Church in Asia Minor, and the pattern for the entire future Church is developing. On their way back to Antioch where their journey began, Paul and Barnabas revisit each local church to provide for leadership in the form of ordained elders. It appears that the pattern was to ordain a multiplicity of elders in each local church; notice the use of the plural, "elders" and the singular "church" here in v 23. Later, in I Peter 5:1-4, Peter will use the plural "elders" and "lords," and the singular "flock." It does appear that each local church was to be ruled by a group of elders, and not just one man,, for we are about to see, in Chapt 15, that in the church at Jerusalem, where it all began, decisions are reached by a multiplicity of elders, but with James pronouncing final decisions as the ruling elder¹²⁰.

55. Up to Jerusalem to Have a Matter Settled. (15:1-5)

Some of the early disciples travel "down" from Judaea to Antioch, where they argue that Gentiles can't be redeemed Christians without first becoming observant Jewish proselytes, i.e. being circumcised, observing the Sabbaths, and obeying the

¹¹⁸ We are not told what was happening to Barnabas all this time; it would be interesting to know.

¹¹⁹ Attalia was a seaport on the coast of Pamphylia, at the mouth of the river Cattarrhactes, a short distance east of Perga. It still exists and today is called Adalia. It was not mentioned in the account of the out-bound journey

¹²⁰ Proverbs 11:14.

Jewish Law¹²¹. Paul and Barnabas, who know better, and who have the recent experiences on their journey to prove it, take issue with these men. It is decided that Paul, Barnabas, and certain others in the church at Antioch should go up to Jerusalem and present the question to the elders there¹²². Along the way, through Phoenicia and Samaria, they declare the conversion of the Gentiles and create great joy among the disciples. Arriving at Jerusalem they present their argument to the elders. Pharisees among the Christians there disagree; they argue hotly that, to become a Christian, a Gentile must also comply with the Jewish Law.

56. Settling a Great Conflict: Law versus Grace. (15:6-21)

A meeting of the apostles and elders in the Jerusalem church is held to settle this great doctrinal conflict. The redeemed Pharisees argue for their position and there is much discussion. Then Peter stands up, reminds the group of his experience at the home of Cornelius (Chapter 10), and eloquently argues that salvation is by grace alone, through faith. He reminds the group that neither the living Jews nor their ancestors have been able to keep the law; and he asks, rhetorically, why they should place this impossible burden on the Gentile converts.

With the Pharisees silenced by Peter's argument, Paul and Barnabas tell of their experiences in Asia Minor; they are like Peter's, only in many places, over a long period of time. With this, James, who is presiding over the meeting, announces his decision. Quoting from the prophet Amos, he declares that God is indeed receiving Gentiles into the Church without complying with the Jewish law, a thing which cannot be denied. Therefore, he says, the only requirements for them are four prohibitions; we might think of these rules as "the four commandments" for Gentile Christians:

- a. abstain from "the pollutions of idols";
- b. abstain from sexual sin;
- c. abstain from eating meat from animals which have been killed by strangling (and not bled); and
- d. abstain from drinking or eating blood in any form.

A great milestone in the life of the Church has been reached.

NOTES:

a. Here it is made clear that James, half-brother of Jesus and future author of a New Testament book, has become the ruling elder in the church at Jerusalem; and, at least for that early period, he is the de facto head of the entire Church.

b. These four prohibitions, remnants of the Mosaic Law, were given by God for the sake of the health of his people. Abstaining from things offered to idols

¹²¹ This is an extreme example of the practice of saying always, "up to Jerusalem" and "down from Jerusalem" (or Judaea), regardless of the direction traveled; Antioch is 300 miles north of Jerusalem.

¹²² Although it is not recorded here, Titus was in this group from the church at Antioch (Gal 2:1).

protected the spiritual health of the people. Abstaining from sexual sin protected physical health, spiritual health, and the integrity of the family; it is also significant in that prostitution was a prominent feature of worship in pagan temples. Abstaining from consuming strangled animals, and blood in any form, protects the physical health; and this prohibition goes all the way back to God's ancient covenant with Noah, 500 years before the covenant with Abraham, and 1,000 years before the Levitical law given to Moses¹²³. An animal that is killed, but not bled out before cooking, will have a great deal of blood trapped in the circulatory system. Blood is a tissue which decomposes rapidly and may become toxic; and it is an ideal medium for the growth of disease-producing bacteria.

c. It seems here that "pollutions of idols" means to abstain from all things associated with idol worship, which was (and is) almost always sexual. The Greek word rendered "abstain" is "apecho," meaning to have nothing to do with the thing referenced--to stand apart from it. Thus the emphasis is upon abstaining from all of the immoral and wicked practices inherent in idol worship. The prohibition does not seem to refer to foods that have been offered to idols, for food prohibitions are dealt with separately here. In addition, this would have been unavoidable because much of the meat and other foods for sale in markets had been previously offered to idols, and such foods were not separated from the rest. Also, in Paul's letters to Gentile churches he writes that eating food that was previously offered to idols is permissible, with one exception: if a new, immature, Christian believes it to be sinful--for him, then, it would be sinful¹²⁴.

57. Making It Official. (15:22-34)

With the apostles, elders and the entire church body at Jerusalem in agreement, Paul and Barnabas ("men who have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ") are sent back to Antioch with letters to the churches in Antioch, in Syria and Cilicia, declaring this new doctrinal concept. Sent with them, to confirm the validity of the letters, are two of the leading men of the Jerusalem church, Judas Barsabus and Silas. At Antioch Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas declare the news and the believers there rejoice for the consolation the decision brings to them¹²⁵.

¹²³ Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 17:10-14. The Bible is profoundly spiritual, but it is also extremely practical. In the Leviticus passage we are told not only to bleed the animal before cooking, but we are also told to cover the drained blood with dry dirt. Anyone who has seen blood drained from an animal, or blood exposed on wounds or bloody corpses, knows how quickly flies will swarm the blood, potentially spreading disease. And, anyway, old blood has a decidedly unpleasant odor.

¹²⁴ For example, see I Corinthians 8:4-13.

¹²⁵ It is consoling to be free from legalistic requirements and the confusion and conflict they impose on us.

After a lengthy stay at Antioch, Judas Barsabas returns to Jerusalem, but Silas elects to stay with the Antioch church¹²⁶.

58. The Second Journey--Paul and Barnabas Split Up. (15:35-41)

Paul and Barnabas abide at Antioch for some time, with Silas and others, teaching the believers there. Eventually Paul suggests to Barnabas that they visit all the churches that they had established in Cyprus and Asia Minor. Barnabas agrees, and intends to take his young kinsman, John Mark, with them; but at this point conflict arises. Paul does not want to take John Mark along, for the lad had left them during the first trip, and returned to Jerusalem. He and Barnabas disagree so strongly that they end their ministerial partnership over this; Barnabas then takes John Mark and sails for Cyprus. Paul decides to take Silas as his new partner in ministry and, with the blessing of the Antioch church, heads, overland, for the churches in Asia Minor. They travel northward through Syria, then westward into Asia Minor. From this point onward it will be Paul and Silas, rather than Paul and Barnabas¹²⁷.

59. Paul Meets Timothy. (16:1-5)

Paul and Silas visit the new churches at Derbe and Lystra. At Lystra they meet a young believer named Timothy, son of a Jewish mother who is a believer, and a Greek (Gentile) father. Timothy is well thought of by the believers in Lystra and Iconium, and Paul, apparently seeing Timothy's potential, recruits him and makes him a ministry partner. Knowing that Timothy may not be accepted by some Jewish Christians because of his Greek father, Paul circumcises him. Paul, Silas, and Timothy then travel to the churches in the area, declaring the good news of the "four commandments," and delivering the letter from James and the church at Jerusalem; the churches rejoice and new believers are added to the churches daily. This is the beginning of what will be a long and fruitful father-son relationship between Paul and Timothy.

NOTES:

- a. Surely, there was a delay before departing, to allow Timothy to heal.*
- b. Interestingly, Paul met young Timothy at Lystra, where Paul had been stoned, left for dead and miraculously healed (14:8-20). If they were met with hostility in Lystra on this second journey it is not recorded.*

60. "Come Over into Macedonia and Help Us." (16:6-12)

Paul, Silas and Timothy travel northward through the provinces of Galatia and Phrygia, then westward through the province of Mysia. They are forbidden by the

¹²⁶ Nothing else is known about this respected prophet; his surname (Barsabas) simply identifies his father.

¹²⁷ Paul, Barnabas and John Mark will eventually be reconciled, as we shall see in Paul's letters.

Holy Spirit to preach in the region of Asia¹²⁸. They plan to go farther northward into Bythinia; but again the Spirit stops them, and they travel westward to Troas, on the coast of the Aegean Sea.

At Troas Paul sees, in a night vision, a man of Macedonia, saying, “Come over into Macedonia and help us.” By this time Luke (“the beloved physician”) has joined the party, and Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke immediately set sail for the island of Samothrace, thence northwestward to Neapolis on the Macedonian coast. From Neapolis they travel overland a short distance westward to Philippi, the chief city in that part of Macedonia, where they stay for several days. Great things will happen there

NOTES:

a. The point at which Luke joined the party is not recorded, but in verse 10 is the first use of “we”/“us” in his narrative of the Book of Acts. He probably met them at Troas. “We” and “us” will now appear in the narrative frequently as Luke continues the narrative.

b. It required quite a bit of effort for the Holy Spirit to get Paul and party pointed in the right direction. Remembering this should be comforting to us when the Spirit has trouble getting us pointed in the right direction.

61. Paul and Party Meet Lydia. (16:13-15)

On the Sabbath day in Philippi Paul and his party go to a river bank where people gather to pray, and they find a group of women praying. They sit down with the women and speak to them of the Lord. One of the women is Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from Thyatira. It seems that she is not a Jewess by birth, but is a proselyte, for she is described simply as one “which worshipped God.” Since no husband is mentioned, she is probably a widow. Paul preaches, Lydia is converted, and he baptizes her there, along with her household servants. She urges Paul and his party to lodge with her while they are in Philippi, and this they do. She was probably a wealthy woman with a large home.

NOTES:

a. The purple dye used in producing this cloth was made from a mollusk (shellfish), murex, a sea snail. The dye was difficult to extract, greatly valued by the wealthy, and expensive. Purple came to be the color associated with royalty; thus a purple robe was placed on Jesus prior to his crucifixion, to mock Him.

b. Thyatira was in Asia Minor; one of the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3 was located there. It was famous for its dyed cloth because the water there was considered to be ideal for the production of dyes.

¹²⁸ This does not refer to the huge continent of Asia. Here it refers to the Roman province of Asia (Proconsular Asia), which included Phrygia and Mysia. At other times in the New Testament “Asia” is used to refer to all of Asia Minor.

c. The names and the ancient history become interesting here. Thyatira, where Paul met Lydia, in the Iron Age (approximately 1200-700 BC--year ranges vary with different scholars) was an important city in the Kingdom of Lydia, which covered most of Roman Asia, which we now call Asia Minor (most of which is now Turkey).

It was, in the Iron Age, as it was in Paul's day, an important center in the production of expensive dyes. So Paul met Lydia, a dealer in expensive dyes and dyed fabrics, who also seems to have lived in Thyatira, in what was the ancient Kingdom of Lydia (from which her name was almost certainly derived), and was even in those ancient times famous for the same products: expensive dyes and dyed fabrics.

d. It is difficult (if not impossible) to know, from the wording of v 14, whether Lydia was a native of Thyatira, or was just a seller of its purple cloth who lived in Philippi. Most authorities believe that she was a native of Thyatira who lived in Philippi. She was probably one of "those women which labored with me in the gospel" mentioned by Paul in Phil 4:3.

62. Unjust Punishment for a Good Deed. (16:19-24)

As Paul and his party are going to pray, they meet a slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination, valuable to her masters as a fortune-teller¹²⁹. She follows the party around, saying "These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation." What she says is true, but in a wrong spirit; it is disruptive, calling attention to herself, and she does it day after day.

Finally it vexes Paul to the point that he turns to her and commands the evil spirit to leave her. The demon flees, and she is free; but now she cannot tell fortunes, and her owners are furious! They drag Paul and Silas before the magistrates and make false accusations concerning them. An excited crowd gathers, joining in the fictitious accusations. It is a gathering, irrational, emotional storm. The robes are torn off of Paul and Silas, they are severely beaten with rods (heavy walking sticks), and locked in the inner dungeon of the jail with their feet in stocks.

NOTE: *Divination is the seeking of occult, hidden knowledge, apart from God; it is an ancient practice, strongly condemned by God as being worthy of death. Some who practice this today are deceivers, pretending to have supernatural knowledge; others are assisted by evil spirits of divination. Either way, it is a sin--an abomination to our Holy God. Evil spirits, like their master, Satan, have some supernatural knowledge, but it is limited. The Holy Spirit, being divine, has all knowledge, and is never wrong.*

¹²⁹ See in this regard Deuteronomy 18:10-22.

It is useful to remember that in the occult practice of divination the diviner is glorified. But when a Christian is given a bit of supernatural knowledge (the word of knowledge, word of wisdom, or a prophetic word) by the Holy Spirit, it is always Jesus always who is glorified--never the Christian--for the Holy Spirit will only glorify Jesus¹³⁰.

*For more information concerning divination see the Study Guide to Deuteronomy 18:9-15 and the explanatory. **NOTE** following.*

63. A Miracle at Midnight. (16:25-28)

Paul and Silas, lying in a filthy dungeon, with their backs terribly wounded and their feet in stocks, pray, sing and praise the Lord, as the other prisoners listen. Instead of groaning in pain and complaining of the injustice done them, they are having a praise meeting! Suddenly, at midnight, an earthquake shakes the jail, the gates open and the shackles fall from the prisoners. When the jailor is awakened and sees the gates open he assumes that the prisoners have escaped; drawing his sword, he prepares to fall on it and kill himself (it would be preferable to crucifixion). Before the jailor can kill himself, however, Paul shouts to him from within the dungeon telling him not to harm himself, for the prisoners are all still there.

NOTES:

a. Amazing, supernatural things are going on here! The gates open, the shackles spontaneously become unlocked and fall off the prisoners, and Paul knows that the other prisoners in the jail have not fled (he knows this supernaturally, it seems, for it is very dark in the jail--the jailor will need a lantern to see).

b. It would not be unreasonable to assume that the other prisoners with Paul and Silas have come to the Lord during the late-night praise meeting; otherwise they would almost certainly have taken the opportunity to escape. It is also possible that they were simply held in place supernaturally by the Holy Spirit. In either case, it would have been a great opportunity to encounter the truth and the power of the Holy Spirit and receive redemption!

64. Salvation Comes to the House of the Jailor. (16:29-34)

Hearing that the prisoners are still there, the jailor takes a lantern inside, sees that no one has escaped, and falls down before Paul and Silas. Still shaken, undoubtedly relieved, and now under conviction, he asks them what he must do to be saved. They tell him that he must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and they tell him that if he does this he will be saved, and all of his household. The jailor, of course, doesn't know what they mean by this, but he rouses his family and servants, and Paul and Silas preach the gospel to them. The jailor and his entire

¹³⁰ I Corinthians 12:8-22; Jn 16:13-14.

household believe and are baptized. The jailor cleans the wounds of Paul and Silas, then feeds them, and there is rejoicing.

65. But the Magistrates Are in Trouble. (16:35-40)

In the morning the magistrates apparently realize that Paul and Silas have done no wrong, and they send subordinates to the jail with orders to release them; but it isn't going to be that easy, because Paul and Silas are both Roman citizens. Not only that, but Paul refuses to leave until the magistrates themselves come to the jail to admit their error¹³¹. Learning of their Roman citizenship, the magistrates realize that they are in serious violation of Roman law, and are terrified. They rush to the jail, ask forgiveness, and ask Paul and Silas to please leave town. Now on top of the situation, Paul and Silas go to the house of Lydia, speak words of comfort to the believers there and depart, leaving many new Christians and a budding new church in Philippi.

66. Trouble at Thessalonica. (17:1-9)

Passing through the cities of Amphipolis and Apollonia, Paul and Silas stop at Thessalonica where there is one synagogue. For three successive weekly Sabbaths Paul reasons with the Jews in the synagogue there, declaring Jesus to be the Messiah. Some of the Jews believe and join him, as well as many of the devout Greek proselytes and a considerable number of the prominent women. But the Jews who do not believe are envious of the success of Paul; they gather a crowd of hoodlums and idle miscreants and create an uproar at the home of Jason, where Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke have been staying. Paul and company are not there, so the mob drags Jason and a few other believers before the magistrates, falsely accusing them of teaching opposition to Caesar. Apparently not knowing what to do, the magistrates release Jason and the others on bail.

NOTES:

a. A pattern is developing, and it will be an ongoing thorn in Paul's flesh until he takes his final journey--to Rome and martyrdom. The offended Jews, in places where he has preached and been forced to leave, will not be satisfied just to get rid of him; they will follow him to other places and stir up as much trouble as they can. Could this be his famous "thorn in his flesh"?¹³²

b. This kind of irrational, murderous fury is not natural; it seems to have been stimulated by what I have come to call "religious spirits" (and what Paul referred to, in I Tim 4:1, as "doctrines of devils"). If an unbeliever says to us that Jesus was just the illegitimate son of a Jewish slut, it would make us sad--we don't want

¹³¹ Humility was not among Paul's strongest virtues; in this regard see also 22:24-28.

¹³² II Corinthians 12:7.

anyone to think such things about Him or his wonderful mother; but it doesn't make us want to kill the person who has said this terrible thing.

On the other hand, if you disagree with someone in a cult (such as Jehovah's Witnesses), or with a Christian really devoted to a doctrine, the reaction is almost always the same: it makes that person angry. For more on this see "Falling in Love with a Doctrine: an Insidious Trap" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

This angry reaction will be a matter of degrees, depending on the degree of the individual's passionate commitment to the doctrine. This probably explains the irrational, murderous, fury that erupts among many Muslims when their religious doctrines are questioned or offended. They will even kill one another over doctrines when aroused, especially over the Suni/Shia division.

67. The Noble Bereans. (17:10-15)

Jason and his Christian friends smuggle Paul and company out of the city by night and send them to Berea. At Berea, as he always does, Paul goes to the synagogue to preach. He finds the Bereans more noble-minded and receptive than the Jews at Thessalonica, for they listen politely and carefully to Paul, and search the Scriptures daily to verify what Paul is teaching. Many of the Berean Jews believe, as well as a considerable number of Greeks, both men and women¹³³.

Things are going nicely at Berea until the troublemakers back at Thessalonica hear that Paul and company are preaching there and making converts. They travel to Berea, and begin to stir up trouble there¹³⁴. Paul is urged by the believers at Berea to leave immediately. Taking ship, he sails southward for Athens, accompanied by some Berean believers; but Silas and Timothy remain for a time at Berea¹³⁵.

When Paul subsequently sends word for Silas and Timothy to join him in Athens, they hasten to catch up with him.

68. Paul at Mars Hill. (17:16-34)

Paul and his Berean escort arrive at Athens, and he sends his escort back to Berea to tell Silas and Timothy to join him in Athens without delay. Paul finds Athens wholly given to idolatry, and he speaks of Jesus to the Jews in the synagogue there, and to all others who will listen. Some philosophers from the schools of the Epicureans and the Stoics hear Paul, and they think that he is speaking of strange gods unknown to them. They are interested, and they bring him to the Areopagus,

¹³³ We are not told how the gospel was received by the Jewish women, but it is a reasonable assumption that their response was approximately the same as that of the men, and perhaps even greater.

¹³⁴ It is about 50 miles from Thessalonika to Berea, about three days of hard walking. These vindictive Thessalonian Jews must have really hated Paul and his message of truth.

¹³⁵ The passage does not say whether Luke remained behind or accompanied Paul to Athens; and it is difficult to know, for Luke speaks of himself only rarely, in his use of "we" and "us."

where philosophers and others gather daily to discuss ideas concerning religion and philosophy.

Paul is in a perfect place with a perfect audience, for Athenians of means gather there daily, curious to hear new ideas. Paul opens by saying that he can see that the Athenians are always ready to hear more about religion, and he mentions that he has noticed an altar dedicated “To the Unknown God.” It is a perfect opening for him, and he tells them that it is this unknown deity that he has come to declare. He then tells them of Jesus, and of his resurrection from the dead. The resurrection is too much for most of the listeners and they mock Paul; but some believe, including Dionysias, a member of the court that meets there, and a woman named Damaris.

***NOTE:** The Areopagus (“Hill of Ares”) is a rocky hilltop, immediately to the northwest of, and adjacent to, the Acropolis and its classic temple, the Parthenon. The Areopagus was dedicated to Ares, the Greek god of war. The Romans called it Mars Hill, for Mars, their name for the god of war. It is by this Roman name that the hill is identified here (v 22), and by which it is known to students of the Bible today. Areopagus was both the name of the hill, and of the court that assembled there to manage both political and religious matters. Dionysias, the new believer, was a member of this court--thus his title, “Areopagite.”*

69. From Athens to Corinth. (18:1-5)

Leaving Athens, Paul travels to Corinth, a trip of about 50 miles¹³⁶. In Corinth he meets a Jewish married couple, Aquila and Priscilla. They have recently come from Italy because of the decree of the Emperor, Claudius, forcing all Jews to leave Rome. Aquila is a tentmaker, as is Paul, and Paul remains in Corinth, living with Aquila and Priscilla. He works with Aquila, making tents, and reasons with local Jews in the synagogue each Sabbath¹³⁷. Silas and Timothy arrive from Berea (by way of Athens) and finally rejoin him. Paul and company will remain in Corinth for 18 months.

***NOTE:** According to an ancient Syriac document attributed to “Addaeus the apostle,” Aquila and Priscilla remained with Luke until his death (see the discussion under “**Author**” in the introductory material of this study guide to Acts).*

70. Jesus Speaks Again to Paul. (18:6-11)

¹³⁶ Corinth, at the time, was the Romans’ political capital of Greece, as Athens, about 50 miles to the northeast, was the cultural and intellectual capital. The Roman proconsul had his seat (headquarters) at Corinth. Corinth was also an extremely important commercial center, and a very prosperous city.

¹³⁷ Although Paul was an intellectual, and born into a prosperous family, he had learned the tentmaker’s trade as a boy. It was the custom of that day for all Jewish boys, even the rich, to be taught a trade

The Jews in the synagogue at Corinth become hostile to Paul and he decides to cease speaking there. He shakes his robe at them, a symbol of dismissal comparable to turning the back and shaking the feet at them; and he announces that henceforth he will teach the Gentiles. He moves his base of operation to the home of a Greek named Justus, who lives next door to the synagogue. Crispus, chief rabbi of the synagogue, becomes a believer, with all his household, and many other Corinthians also believe and are baptized¹³⁸.

Jesus comes to Paul in the night to encourage him. He tells Paul not to be afraid, that He has many believers in Corinth, and He tells Paul to keep teaching and preaching there. Paul is obedient; he continues in Corinth for 18 months.

NOTES:

a. Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, was the leader of all of the Jews in Corinth. He presided over all assemblies, interpreted the Jewish law, deciding what was lawful and what was unlawful, and punished those who violated the law. He also solemnized marriages and ruled over divorces. His conversion was of enormous significance.

b. There must have been more hostility toward Paul and company than is apparent in the passage, because he had everything going for him there; nevertheless, it was important enough for Jesus to come personally to Paul in a vision, to encourage and reassure him.

71. Paul Is Accused Before Gallio. (18:12-17)

Finally the men of the Corinthian synagogue can no longer stand what is happening next door; they seize Paul and take him before Gallio, Roman proconsul of the province of Achaia (most of Greece) and accuse him of violating Jewish law. Paul prepares to defend himself, but doesn't get the chance. When Gallio realizes that Paul is charged only with violating Jewish religious law, and not Roman law, he refuses to be bothered with it and dismisses the entire group. Before the Jews leave, however, seeing the indifference of Gallio to the entire affair, they beat Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, before the judgment seat.

NOTES:

a. This Sosthenes appears to have been the successor to Crispus as ruler of the Corinthian synagogue. Having had Crispus, their leader, become a Christian convert had been a severe blow to the Jews at Corinth; to have his successor also become a Christian must have been even more offensive. This may be what finally drove the Jews to file charges against Paul and, frustrated by the indifference of

¹³⁸ It must have been really irritating to the unbelieving Jews to have their leader accept the gospel that they had rejected and to consort with Paul, whom they saw as an enemy. And it must have been particularly galling to have all that revival going on right next door.

Gallio to their complaint, to beat Sosthenes. This Sosthenes is probably the one with Paul when he later wrote the 1st letter to the church at Corinth (I Cor 1:1).

b. We must wonder about an apparent conflict between vv 16 and 17: if Gallio has driven the angry Jews from before his judgment seat, how could they then beat Sosthenes "before the judgment seat"?

It probably means that Gallio dismissed them all from his immediate presence on his seat of judgment, and the frustrated Jews took Sosthenes outside and beat him in the street, right in front of the judgment hall. Gallio was satisfied to have them out of his court; but physically they were still before the seat of judgment. In our justice system the center of government in a county is the "county seat"; it is not a chair--it is a place--a place where records are kept and judgment is made in court cases¹³⁹.

72. The End of Paul's Second Missionary Journey. (18:18-22)

After the hearing before Gallio, Paul remains in Corinth for some time. Deciding to end his journey and return to Antioch of Syria, he shaves his head, as part of a vow that he has taken. He first travels southward to Cenchrea, taking Priscilla and Aquila with him¹⁴⁰. From Cenchrea he sails across the Aegean Sea to Ephesus where he remains for a while, reasoning with the Jews in the synagogue. He decides to then go on to Antioch, leaving Aquila and Priscilla at Ephesus, saying that he must keep "the feast that cometh up in Jerusalem¹⁴¹." Nothing is said here about Silas and Timothy, but it is reasonable to assume that they travel on with Paul. Paul sails for Israel, lands at Caesarea, and travels overland to Jerusalem; he greets the church there and, almost certainly, reports the events of his long journey. From Jerusalem he travels overland to Antioch, ending his second missionary journey where it had begun. He was back home.

***NOTE:** We are told nothing about the vow, or the reason for it. It would mean that Paul had taken a Nazarite vow to perform something, or to abstain from something, for a specific period of time. This was not in conflict with the teaching of Jesus in Matt 5:33-37, where He was speaking of the common misuse of swearing by God, the Temple, or some other holy person or thing in speaking of trivial matters, as was apparently being done. In speaking of such every day matters, He said, we should simply say it: "Let your communication be Yea, yay,*

¹³⁹ The subdivisions of the states called counties in the rest of the states are, in Louisiana, called parishes.

¹⁴⁰ The married couple, Aquila and Priscilla, exceptional believers and teachers, appear six times in the New Testament. It is interesting that in three cases they are referred to as "Aquila and Priscilla," and in three cases they are referred to as "Priscilla and Aquilla, as here." This suggests an equality in the couple: they definitely ministered as a team.

¹⁴¹ The feast Paul referred to here is unknown; it was perhaps Passover.

Nay, nay..."; and, by implication, their trivializing of God, or other sacred persons or things, the people were in danger of violating the 3rd Commandment.

Paul had taken a specific Nazarite vow, for a specific period of time, and had his head shaved as a symbol of it. This was an entirely different matter from what Jesus proscribed in Matt 5:33-37. Perhaps he did it to influence certain Jews that he expected to encounter at Ephesus.

* * * * *

A Note Concerning the Third Missionary Journey

The third missionary journey presents difficulties. This is because there are portions of the third journey that are--literally--unknown. For this reason, commentaries and chronologies concerning this third journey, and maps depicting the journey, will vary from one source to another. What follows is the best treatment I can give it; but keep in mind the fact that there are portions of the third journey that are not described in detail, leaving gaps in the narrative in the original manuscripts.

* * * * *

73. Back on the Road--the Third Journey. (18:23)

Paul stays at Antioch for some time, and then leaves again for what will be his third and final missionary journey; he will revisit the churches in the regions of Galatia and Phrygia, in an orderly way, to strengthen and encourage them¹⁴².

NOTES:

a. It seems that we cannot say with certainty that this third missionary journey will be his last. His next journey, after this third one, will be to Rome, where he is imprisoned and, ultimately, executed as a martyr. There is reason to believe, however, that after being imprisoned in Rome for two years, he was released temporarily, and returned to visit his churches in Greece, Macedonia and Asia Minor, after which he was again arrested, imprisoned in Rome, and finally put to death. If this is true, then this missionary journey will not be his last; however, this trip is what is traditionally referred to as his third, and last, missionary journey.

¹⁴² It appears that Silas, Paul's chief companion on the second missionary journey, did not accompany him on the third journey; he is not mentioned after Acts 18:5.

*b. For a fuller discussion of what probably took place between the end of Acts and Paul's death, see **EPILOGUE** at the end of this study guide to Acts.*

74. Aquila and Priscilla Meet Apollos. (18:24-28)

Meanwhile, at Ephesus, a man named Apollos, a Jew born in Alexandria, arrives and begins to preach the gospel of Jesus. He is well versed in the Old Testament Scriptures, eloquent, zealous and a mighty preacher; but he is not fully taught, and he knows only the baptism of John the Baptist, i.e. the baptism of repentance. He speaks boldly and powerfully in the synagogue, where he meets Aquila and Priscilla. They realize that Apollos is not fully taught, and they take him into their fellowship and instruct him more fully. After this time of learning, Apollos desires to cross the Aegean Sea to Achaia (most of Greece), and the church at Ephesus gives him a letter of introduction to the churches there. In Achaia Apollos is greatly effective, strengthening the churches and demonstrating by the Scriptures, to the Jews in the synagogues, that Jesus is the Messiah.

* * * * *

AN APPARENT PROBLEM IN ACTS 19

At this point in Luke's narrative there appears to be a problem. As we shall see, Chapter 19 opens with the arrival of Paul in Ephesus, where he finds a small group of untaught believers who, like Apollos, have heard only of the baptism of John the Baptist, i.e. the baptism of repentance. Paul instructs them more fully, baptizes them in the name of the Lord Jesus, and they receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Then there follows a period of about three years in which significant events take place, and after which he departs for Macedonia¹⁴³. We already know that, on his previous journey, Paul had left Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus, with the church they, together with Paul, Timothy and others, had established there. And yet, in all that takes place in Chapter 19, there is no mention of Aquila and Priscilla, or of the church that is already there. We find Timothy with Paul in verse 22, where Paul sends him, with another disciple named Erastus, into Macedonia to prepare the way for him there. This tells us that Timothy was in Ephesus during some of the events of Chapter 19. But where were Aquila and Priscilla, and the Ephesian church? It is reasonable to assume that Aquila and Priscilla were also there, leading the Ephesian church, but took no active part in the events of Chapter 19; we know that they were still there, leading the church in their

¹⁴³ We know from verses 8-10 that Paul initially taught in the synagogue for three months, and then taught in the school of one Tyrannus for two years. Since he was in Ephesus for three years on this trip (20:31), the remaining nine months must be represented by verses 21-22 ("for a season"), with verses 23-41 describing his dramatic exit.

home, when Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthian church, about three years later (I Corinthians 16:8-9, 19).

And so, when Paul arrived in Ephesus for the second time, since the Ephesian church was already there, led by Aquila and Priscilla, who, then were the 12 untaught believers whom Paul instructs and baptizes in the opening verses of Chapter 19? I can only assume that they were a small group, somewhere in the city, not yet acquainted with the existing church at Ephesus, and perhaps not even aware of it. Remember that verse 1 says that Paul “found” them--not that he met them at the church there. Ephesus was a very large and thriving coastal city, with many people coming and going, at the mouth of a major river, one of the major sea ports in the ancient world, and the Roman capital of the province of Asia (most of what we call Asia Minor today). It was reportedly the second largest city in the known World at the time, with a population of 250,000. With information transmitted only by word of mouth in this bustling, populous city, such a small group could have existed, unknown to the Ephesian church, until discovered and ministered to by Paul.

This is the best supposition that I can offer.

* * * * *

75. Paul at Ephesus. (19:1-7)

After being taught the gospel message more fully by Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos leaves Ephesus and goes to Corinth to preach. Paul arrives in Ephesus, and finds a group of 12 disciples there. Apparently sensing that there is something missing in their Christian experience, he asks them if they have received the Holy Ghost since they believed. They reply that they have not even heard of the Holy Ghost, and this causes him to ask what baptism they have received; they reply that they have received only the baptism of John the Baptist. Paul explains what they have missed, and baptizes them in water in the name of the Lord Jesus. He then lays his hands on them and they receive the Holy Ghost, speak with tongues and prophesy. These disciples are now prepared to enter fully into their Christian lives, and it is reasonable to assume that Paul then introduces them to the church led by Aquila and Priscilla, for further teaching.

76. Special Miracles in Ephesus. (19:8-12)

For three months Paul teaches and reasons with the local Jews in the synagogue at Ephesus; but they are not receptive, so he takes leave of them, with his disciples, and moves his operation to the philosophical school of a man named Tyrannus. This is apparently a setting where discussions of new doctrines are welcome, and Paul continues there for two years. His teachings are received by both Jews and

Gentiles, and news of the gospel spreads over the region. During this time God performs miracles through Paul that are called “special” miracles. One example of this is that cloths which Paul has held or worn are sent to the sick; and when the sick receive the cloths they are healed, and evil spirits are driven from those who are bound. This is the only place in the Bible where certain miracles are referred to as “special.”

NOTES:

a. With the exception of the Ark of the Covenant, which seems to have been in a category all its own, here is one of very few instances in the Bible of an inanimate object's being endued with the power of the Holy Spirit--to heal or to do anything else. One such example is the hem of Jesus' cloak which, when the woman with the issue of blood touched it, was a conductor of Holy Spirit power that healed her. Perhaps this is why this sending of cloths from Paul to the sick, as a means of healing them, is given as an example of “special” miracles.

This is the basis for the present-day practice among Pentecostals and others of sending a “blessed cloth,” i.e. one that has been held or worn by someone and prayed over, and then sent to a sick person in hope of healing. Unfortunately, this concept has been used by unscrupulous preachers, usually on radio or television, to raise money. If money, or an object with monetary value, is requested or required in order to receive something from God, we can be sure that the one promising healing or other blessing, at a price, is a charlatan.

b. This performing of “special” miracles by sending out blest cloths may shed some light on the bewildering statement of Jesus in John 14:12, for there is no record of Jesus' having ever done this. In this regard see also the explanatory NOTE after the Highlight treating 5:12-16, “Jerusalem Is Ablaze with the Good News.”

77. A Collision with Spiritual Reality: the Seven Sons of Sceva. (19:13-16)

There were in those days exorcists, mercenaries, who attempted to cast out evil spirits for money. Such practitioners of sorcery usually employed incantations, i.e. the speaking of certain secret words or combinations of words which will force evil spirits to obey them. There was in Ephesus a group of seven such Jewish exorcists, wanderers, the sons of one Sceva, "chief of the priests¹⁴⁴." They apparently have heard of the success of Paul and his associates in such matters, and they have noticed that they always act in such ministry “in the name of Jesus.” Thinking of this as an incantation, and one that always works for Paul and his associates, these exorcists attempt to adopt it for themselves, saying, “We adjure

¹⁴⁴ The literal wording of this phrase, "chief of the priests," indicates that this Sceva, father of the seven vagabond exorcists, was, or had served as, chief priest in the Temple. It is more likely, however, that he was chief of one of the 24 "courses" of priests which served in the Temple.

(command) you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.” They learn, the hard way, that the sacred, powerful and pure name of Jesus cannot be “used” in this way.

The demon they are attempting to cast out is not at all impressed with them, or with what they have said. He replies to them that he knows who Jesus is, and he has heard of Paul, but he is scornful of them. The demonized man then attacks them, rips their clothes off them and beats all seven of them nearly to death; and they flee, barely escaping with their lives, "naked and wounded." One hopes that they recognized the error of their foolish presumption and became valid disciples of Jesus.

NOTES: *In this incident there are three important principles illustrated:*

a. To act in the name of Jesus one must belong to Him. What these sons of Sceva were attempting was comparable to putting on a police uniform and badge, rented from a costume store, holding a toy pistol, and confronting a dangerous and violent criminal, who knows a real policeman when he sees one, and expecting him to obey your commands. Evil spirits recognize the Holy Spirit’s presence (or absence) and they are not impressed with imposters.

b. The Greek verbs here translated “know” in v 15 are revealing. In the first instance, concerning Jesus, it means “Jesus I am aware of and acknowledge”; in the second instance, referring to Paul, it means “I am aware of him, have heard of him and know his reputation.” In essence, the demon is saying, “Jesus we acknowledge--we hate Him, but we tremble at the thought of Him; and we are aware of this Paul, a servant of Jesus who is causing much trouble for us; but you are phonies and I am not at all impressed.”

c. Some demonized people are possessed of supernatural strength. To physically subdue a small man or woman, empowered by such an evil spirit, can require the strength of several large, strong men.

78. Mass Repentance by Occult Practitioners. (19:17-20)

News of the unhappy experience of the seven sons of Sceva spreads through Ephesus, and both Jews and Gentiles are struck with fear and respect for the Lord Jesus; his name is exalted and glorified. Many believe the gospel, confess their wickedness and sins, and are converted. Many of them, who have practiced sorcery and other occult arts, like the sons of Sceva, repent¹⁴⁵. They bring their occult books and burn them publicly. The books they burn are valuable and could have been sold for a great deal of money; but these men and women value their redemption much more than their evil books. The good news of salvation sweeps

¹⁴⁵ We are not told whether or not the seven sons of Sceva repented and became believers; but if they had half a brain each, they did.

over Ephesus and is widely received. Things could not be going better for Paul and his associates; but there is trouble ahead.

***NOTE:** The text evaluates the burned books at 50,000 pieces of silver. It is difficult to calculate such amounts of money in modern terms, but an educated guess at total value of the occult books burned that day was perhaps between \$10,000 and \$30,000. See also in this regard Deuteronomy 7:25; II Sam 5:21 and Jas 4:6-10. An important principle is illustrated here: upon repentance, evil objects should not be sold or given away, passing the spiritual contamination on to others; they should be burned. In the Bible, OT and NT, burning represents cleansing. The ultimate example of this is the Lake of Fire (Rev Chpts 19 and 20), for there can be no wickedness in the New Heaven and New Earth; it will be completely cleansed.*

79. Trouble in Ephesus. (19:21-34)

Paul now intends to visit the churches in Macedonia, and he sends Timothy and Erastus as his advance team; he plans to return, after the trip through Macedonia, to Jerusalem, and then to travel to Rome. At the same time, trouble is brewing in Ephesus over declining sales of pagan shrines¹⁴⁶. A silversmith named Demetrius, one of a number of them in Ephesus who make and sell these shrines, calls the others together to deal with a problem. These silversmiths have been making money selling silver shrines dedicated to Diana; but now there are so many in Ephesus who are becoming Christians and abandoning the pagan worship of Diana that sales of the pagan shrines are seriously falling off¹⁴⁷. There is at Ephesus a magnificent temple of Diana, one of the seven wonders of the ancient World, and the Ephesians are very proud of it. Demetrius and his fellow artisans are also offended that Paul and others have taught the people that gods made with human hands are not gods at all. They gather a crowd and stir the people up. The crowd becomes excited and angry; they seize two Macedonian members of Paul's team, Gaius and Aristarchus, and rush into the local amphitheater, where confusion soon reigns. Paul wishes to run into the amphitheater to help his friends, but is wisely advised to stay out of it. A Jew named Alexander is brought forward to attempt to explain and quiet the mob; however, seeing that he is a Jew, they simply shout him down, screaming for two hours with irrational madness, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." Most of the people in the crowd don't even know why they are there, but are caught up in the madness. There is very great danger of bloodshed.

80. The Town Clerk to the Rescue. (19:35-41)

¹⁴⁶ These "shrines" (Greek *naos*) were silver models of the inmost part of the temple, including the statue of Diana.

¹⁴⁷ The Greek word here translated "Diana" is actually *Artemis*, the Greek name for the Roman goddess, Diana. The Roman name was used in the translation because the events occurred during the Roman era, in the Roman province of Asia.

Seeing the danger of serious trouble, the town clerk takes the floor to speak¹⁴⁸. Gaining the crowd's attention, he assures them that the reputation of Ephesus and its devotion to Diana, and the image which fell from Zeus (the chief Greek god) in the sky, are so famous and well established that there is nothing to fear from what the Christians are saying. He says that the Christians are not temple robbers or blasphemers, and if the silversmiths have a charge against them it should be made according to the law. Further, he says, if the tumult continues they are in danger of being charged with a breach of the law by the Roman authorities (and the Romans would punish them harshly). Having thus calmed and warned them, he sends them away.

NOTES:

a. The Temple of Diana was indeed a wonder. It was the largest Greek temple ever built (approximately 140 x 80 yards). Originally dedicated to the Greek goddess, Artemis, the Romans dedicated it to their Diana, goddess of the hunt. According to Pliny the Elder, it was built on marshy ground, on a foundation of charcoal and animal skins so that, during earthquakes it could move, thus not break and collapse. If Pliny was correct it is remarkable, because modern engineers have developed this technological concept only in very recent times.

It was to this temple in Ephesus that Arsinoe, Cleopatra's half-sister, was banished in exile from Egypt; her banishment was ordered by Marc Antony, at the urging of Cleopatra. And it was on the steps of the Temple that Arsinoe was murdered, on orders from Cleopatra, in 41 BC. An octagonal tomb, discovered in the center of Ephesus in the 1990s, is believed by the Austrian archeologists who excavated it to be Arsinoe's tomb.

b. The image here referred to by the clerk as having fallen from the sky, was undoubtedly a stone, supposed to be an image of Diana, and one which had fallen so long ago, the people believed, that no one knew when it had happened.. It was not uncommon for pagan priests of that time to keep a "sacred" stone in the temple, telling the people that it was an image of their god which had fallen from the sky, the domain of the gods. Many of them probably believed it themselves.

c. One thing that Roman authorities feared, and would not tolerate, was a riot or tumult; and they could be brutal in bringing a riotous crowd under control and restoring order.

81. Beginning the Return Trip. (20:1-5)

After the tumult created by the silversmiths, Paul and company bid farewell to the disciples in Ephesus and set sail for Macedonia, where he had sent Timothy

¹⁴⁸ The town clerk in Roman cities had duties and authority very much like the city or county court clerk in our court houses today. He kept the archives, drew up official decrees, and read them to the public.

and Erastus. After visiting and encouraging the churches in Macedonia, they travel to Greece¹⁴⁹. After three months of ministry in Greece Paul decides to sail from there, back to the home church at Antioch in Syria; Luke is still with him¹⁵⁰. However, Paul learns of a plot against him by hostile Jews and decides to return overland, back through Macedonia. Sending seven members of his party directly to Troas in Asia Minor by ship (Paul is the only one in danger), Paul and the rest continue overland into Macedonia, thus spoiling the plot against him. From Philippi, they sail to Troas, where the seven-man “advance party,” which had sailed directly there, awaits them¹⁵¹.

82. Marathon Preaching and Raising the Dead at Troas. (20:6-16)

They spend a week in Troas and, on the first day of the week (our Sunday) the church there gathers in a third floor room to worship and break bread (celebrate communion/eucharist). It is the party’s last day in Troas, and Paul preaches until midnight. Paul preached so long that a young man named Eutichus, sitting in a window, falls asleep, falls out of the window and is killed. Paul goes to the man, embraces the dead body, and the dead man is restored to life. After eating some bread, Paul continues preaching until daybreak and departs. The sleepless Christians take Eutichus, the resurrected young man, home and all are comforted and encouraged(although they must have been weary).

Paul sends the rest of the party by ship to Assos while he travels there overland and meets the ship there. From Assos they sail together to Trogyllium, bypassing Ephesus because Paul wants no delay; he wants to reach Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost¹⁵². They spend the night at Trogyllium and the next day they sail onward to Miletus.

NOTES:

a. Here in this passage is an indication that the early Christians met for worship and communion (eucharist) on the 1st day of the week (our Sunday), rather than on the Jewish weekly Sabbath, the 7th day of the week (our Saturday). It also suggests that they had communion (eucharist) every time they met. For more on this matter see “Which Day of the Week Is the Christian Sabbath?” in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

¹⁴⁹ We are not told which churches were visited in Greece, but they were probably Athens, Corinth and Cenchrea.

¹⁵⁰ Verse 5 of Chapter 20 is another of the “we/us” verses; there are eight more appearances of “we” and “us” in the first 16 verses of Chapt 20.

¹⁵¹ Troas was a coastal city near the ancient city of Troy, on the northwest coast of what is today Turkey.

¹⁵² We are not told why it was important for Paul to be at Jerusalem for Pentecost. Perhaps it was for personal reasons--to be there to enjoy the observance, and the anniversary of the coming of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps it was because he knew that Jews from all over the known World would be there and he could preach to them. Perhaps it was for both of these, and other reasons.

b. Trogyllium was a seacoast town opposite the island of Samos. Paul and company spent the night there on the return leg of the 3rd missionary journey. The harbor there is still called "Saint Paul's Port."

c. Some maps of the 3rd missionary journey show Paul's group sailing directly from Mitylene to Miletus; but this must be an error, because v 15 says clearly that they landed at Trogyllium and spent the night there, continuing the next day to Miletus.

They almost certainly sailed onward to Miletus (rather than walking there) after spending the night at Trogyllium, because it would have been a long and difficult walk; and, in early Spring, it would have been difficult to reach Miletus on foot before dark. In addition, Paul was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem before Pentecost, and with favorable winds they could reach Miletus in half the time by ship that it would take for them to walk.

83. Imprisonment and Suffering Await Paul in Jerusalem. (20:17-27)

Arriving at Miletus, Paul and company stop there, and he sends for the elders of the church at Ephesus. When the elders arrive from Ephesus he tells them that his conscience is clear, for he has declared unto them the gospel message in its fullness, omitting nothing. Now, he says, he is inwardly compelled to go to Jerusalem, although, in every city, the Holy Spirit has made it clear that imprisonment and suffering await him there. He faces this with joy, however, knowing that he has been obedient to the ministry given to him by the Lord Jesus; and he tells them that they will not meet again.

NOTE: *Note that the church (singular) at Ephesus had elders (plural). The pattern in the early Church was for each church to have multiple elders, with one of the elders acting as ruling elder--not just one man charged with leadership responsibility and absolute authority. This was the situation in the first church at Jerusalem (Acts 15); and we will see this pattern repeatedly in Acts and the epistles. The danger in having total authority in a church vested in one man is that, in order to mislead and deceive an entire congregation, it is only necessary for that one leader to be mistaken or deceived. There is safety in a multitude of counsellors (Prov 11:14).*

84. Final Instructions for the Elders at Ephesus. (20:28-38)

Paul charges the Ephesian elders to feed God's flock there, which the Lord had purchased with his own blood and warns them that wolves (enemies of the gospel) will attack the church that they lead, and that even some from within the church there will arise, speaking heresies, attempting to draw away disciples after

themselves¹⁵³. Reminding them that he has desired no man's silver, gold or expensive garments, but has supported himself making tents, he quotes the words of Jesus, saying "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Kneeling at the waterfront he prays with them and they weep, embracing and kissing him, grieved at the thought that they will see him no more. Thus weeping, they accompany him to the ship and he sails away.

NOTES:

a. In v 33 Paul includes "garments" with silver and gold as being of similar value. In the ancient world, some garments were valued as much as silver or gold. This is seen numerous times in Scripture, most famously in the case of Achan and the defeat at Ai (Josh 7:21).

*b. The words of Jesus here, one of the most-quoted of his statements, are found nowhere else in Scripture. Had Paul not quoted Him here **we would never have heard this tremendously important statement of the Lord.***

85. Another Warning about Going to Jerusalem. (21:1-6)

Sailing from Miletus they land at the small island of Coos ("Ko oss") and spend the night there¹⁵⁴. From Coos they sail to the island of Rhodes, and from there to Patara on the mainland of the region of Lycia. At Patara, they find a ship bound for Tyre and go aboard. Sailing past the island of Cyprus they land at Tyre, where they stay with believers there for a week. During this stay at Tyre, the disciples there repeatedly warn Paul not to go to Jerusalem, but he is not deterred. The believers there, including their wives and children, accompany Paul's party to the port and send them off with prayer.

86. Paul and Company Visit Philip at Caesaria. (21:7-14)

From Tyre, Paul's company sails to Ptolemais (present day Acre, in northwest Israel), where they stay overnight with the believers there. From Ptolemais they travel to Caesarea and the home of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the original seven deacons (6:1-6) and the man who took the gospel to the city of Samaria (8:5f)¹⁵⁵. Philip has four virgin daughters "who did prophesy," and Paul's party remains in the home of Philip for an extended visit¹⁵⁶. During the visit with Philip and his family, a prophet named Agabus comes from Judaea. Like the Old

¹⁵³ Anyone who twists and distorts the message of Christ is wrong; and anyone who attempts to draw away disciples **to himself** is wrong, no matter how good he sounds. The fulfillment of this prophetic warning is seen in I Tim 1:3-7. See in this regard Isaiah 8:20.

¹⁵⁴ Coos is the birthplace of Hippocrates, father of Western medicine.

¹⁵⁵ It seems strange that they sailed from Tyre to Ptolemais, and then traveled overland to Caesarea, for it is such a short distance from Tyre to Ptolemais, and nearly three times that far from Ptolemais to Caesarea. It may be that they did sail from Ptolemais to Caesarea; but the passage does not tell us how they traveled.

¹⁵⁶ According to Papias, these four daughters of Philip prayed for one man who was raised from the dead (ANF Vol I, Fragments of Papias, VI, p 154).

Testament prophets, who often acted out their prophecies, Agabus takes Paul's belt (girdle), wraps it around his wrists and ankles and says that the Jewish leaders at Jerusalem will in like manner bind the owner of the belt and deliver him up to the Gentiles. Hearing this, both Paul's company and those of Philip's household plead with him, weeping, to stay away from Jerusalem; but again Paul is not deterred. He says that he is not only willing to be imprisoned in Jerusalem, but is willing to die there for the "name of the Lord Jesus"¹⁵⁷. The others realize that it is useless to plead more with him, and they pray that the Lord's will be done.

NOTES:

a. This Agabus is the same prophet who, with others, had come to Antioch to see Paul and Barnabus, and prophesied of a coming famine in Judaea. The famine did occur, most disastrously in Judaea, in the 4th year of Claudius Caesar, 45 AD.¹⁵⁸

According to tradition this Agabus had been one of the "other seventy" sent out by Jesus, two by two, to preach and heal (Lk 10:1f). Agabus and Philip's four daughters are mentioned in the Ante-Nicene Fathers as valid prophets, personally known to the original apostles¹⁵⁹.

b. Ptolemais was the principal seacoast port in Galilee, originally called Accho (or Acco, or Akko)¹⁶⁰. After the conquest of Alexander the Great, and the establishment of the Ptolemy dynasty of Greek Pharaohs, it was re-named Ptolemais to honor one of the early Greek Pharaohs (or perhaps for the entire Ptolemaic dynasty), when Greece controlled Egypt and the Holy Land. In the Bible it is mentioned only here; it is mentioned once in the OT (Judg 1:31), but by its earlier name, Accho. It was a Canaanite city, never conquered by Joshua, but many Jews of the tribe of Asher lived there.

During the Crusades its name was changed to Acre, in honor of Jeane d'Acre (Joan of Arc), the name by which it is known today. Once a major seaport in northwest Israel, today it is only the home port of Israeli fishermen.

c. There are some interesting connections with Cleopatra, Julius Caesar, Marc Antony, and how their lives were connected to the Holy Land. If this interests you,

¹⁵⁷ Here is another place where "the name of the Lord Jesus" does not refer to the word "Jesus" (Yeshua) by which he was addressed. It means the Lord's person, identity, reputation--in short, all that He represents, including the gospel message and the plan of redemption. It is sad that some Christians, who don't understand this, argue and divide over whether or not certain words must be spoken in prayer and water baptism.

¹⁵⁸ Josephus, Antiquities, XX, 2.5 and 5.2.

¹⁵⁹ ANF, Vol 7, Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, VIII, p 481.

¹⁶⁰ The reason for the variety in the spelling of Accho is that it is a transliteration of an ancient name, and not a translation. Thus the spelling is based upon the way it sounds, which leads to various spellings, because they sound the same.

see "Caesar, Antony, Cleopatra and the Holy Land" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

87. Up to Jerusalem: Paul Reports to James. (21:15-19)

Paul and company prepare their "carriages" (baggage) and travel up to Jerusalem, accompanied by some of the saints at Caesarea, one of whom is "an elderly disciple named Mnason," a Cypriot, who has a home in Jerusalem. Paul and company lodge with him there. They are gladly received by the believers in Jerusalem, and on the following day Paul and his companions go to see James and the elders. After greeting them, Paul describes this 3rd journey in great detail.

88. The Elders Have a Plan. (21:20-25)

James and the elders all join in thanking and praising God, rejoicing in what He has accomplished through Paul and his company. There is, however, a problem. The elders warn Paul that many of the Jewish believers in Jerusalem are still zealous for the Law, and that they have believed false reports that Paul has been teaching both Jews and Gentiles that they need not follow the Mosaic law.

Knowing that these Jewish believers will soon learn that Paul is in town, and that they will almost certainly be violent, the elders have a plan¹⁶¹. They have chosen four young men to go into the Temple with Paul, and that all five of them will have their heads shaved in taking a Nazarite vow for seven days, and Paul will present the necessary offerings for all of them. The hope is that, by this, the hostile Jews will see that Paul is still an observant Jew, obeying the Law, that the rumors are false, and the crisis will be averted. And they re-state their earlier decision about the "four commandments," which apply only to Gentile converts—not to Jews.

***NOTE:** The Jewish converts were very slow to abandon the Mosaic Law, and this episode is a vivid example. These new Christians were actually eager to kill another Jewish Christian, one already recognized as an apostle by the Church leadership, and this on the basis of a mere rumor. They didn't even bother to enquire as to whether the rumor was true or false. It seems that God allowed this mixture of beliefs concerning grace and the Law, until He delivered the Church from it entirely. This was accomplished when adherence to the Law became impossible, after the Temple was destroyed, and all Jews were driven from Jerusalem, by Rome in 71 AD.*

It is also an illustration of the fact that new Christians can be prone to serious error and sin because their minds have not been renewed, a process which requires time (Rom 12:2).

¹⁶¹ Here is a vivid example of the fact that becoming a Christian, born of the Spirit into the family of God, does not make one perfect. These new Jewish Christians were still not free from the Levitical Law, and they were capable of hate and murderous violence toward another Christian. The sin nature was still in them, and their minds were a long way from being renewed.

89. But the Plan Doesn't Work. (21:26-40)

Paul and his four companions go to the Temple and do as the elders recommended. It all goes well until, when the seven-day vow is almost ended. Paul and the other four enter the Temple to pay the necessary offerings, and things suddenly go very wrong. Paul is recognized there by zealous Jews from Roman Asia (Asia Minor), some of those who had opposed him on his missionary journeys. They shout false accusations about what he had done in Asia, and another false rumor (that he has taken Gentiles into the Temple) is shouted out. The angry Jews shout for others in the Temple to help them, and quickly an angry mob is formed. Paul is seized and dragged outside the Temple gates, which are closed behind him. The madness spreads, and Paul is beaten, almost to death.

The tumult comes to the attention of the Roman commander, a tribunos (commander of a cohort with its subordinate centurions and soldiers)¹⁶². Roman soldiers rush out of the barracks, the mob sees them coming, and ceases beating Paul; he is rescued, but barely. The soldiers carry him to the barracks, and when they mount the steps Paul asks, in Greek, that he be allowed to speak to the mob¹⁶³. The commander is amazed that he speaks Greek, thinking that he is a notorious Egyptian criminal¹⁶⁴. Beaten nearly to death, Paul still wants to preach! With the commandant's permission Paul, at the entrance to the barracks, turns to the crowd, raises his hand, and the crowd goes silent. He begins to speak to the mob in Hebrew.

90. Paul Addresses the Crowd. (22:1-23)

Hearing Paul, now speaking Hebrew, the crowd is attentive, interested in hearing what he has to say; many of them, without doubt, did not even know why they were beating him¹⁶⁵. He summarizes his impressive Jewish credentials as a student of Gamaliel, and tells them of his history as persecutor of Christians, his meeting Jesus, and his conversion. They listen quietly until he reaches the place where he quotes Jesus as saying that he was sending Paul to the Gentiles. When they hear this, they again go mad, shouting for him to be killed, throwing their cloaks down and throwing dust into the air.

91. Saved from Scourging. (22:24-30)

Seeing the crowd again becoming dangerous, the commandant has Paul brought into the barracks ("castle") to be prepared for examination by flogging. As Paul is being tied down for the scourging, he lets it be known to a centurion standing by

¹⁶² A tribunos was three ranks above a centurion.

¹⁶³ At this point Paul has been beaten so severely that he cannot walk.

¹⁶⁴ Concerning this notorious Egyptian criminal, see Josephus, Antiquities, 20.7.1 and 20.8.5-7 (note footnote f to paragraph 6).

¹⁶⁵ This is characteristic of the mindless fury of such mobs.

that he is a Roman citizen. This changes everything! It is an extremely serious offense to beat or whip a Roman citizen without a hearing or investigation. The centurion informs the commandant that Paul is a Roman citizen. Surprised to learn that Paul is a citizen, the commandant hurries to Paul and asks him if it is true that he is a citizen. Paul says that he is, and the Commandant remarks that he had to pay a very large amount of money for his own Roman citizenship; Paul replies that he was born a citizen of Rome, which places him on a higher social plane than the commandant¹⁶⁶.

Those who were preparing to flog Paul move away from him. It is even a serious offense to tie Paul down in preparation for scourging, and the commandant orders that he immediately be untied, fearing for himself. The following day, in order to learn what offense Paul has committed, the commandant orders the Sanhedrin to assemble, and he places Paul before them.

92. Paul Outsmarts the Sanhedrin. (23:1-10)

As Paul begins to explain himself, Ananias, the high priest, orders those standing by Paul to hit him on the mouth. Paul calls the high priest a “whited wall,” for sitting there to judge him concerning violating the Mosaic Law, but has ordered him to be struck, which is a violation of the law¹⁶⁷. Paul says that he did not realize that he was speaking to the high priest, and apologizes for insulting him, for that is itself a violation of the Law. Then Paul notices that there are both Pharisees and Sadducees on the council. Immediately, he has a plan!

Knowing that the Sadducees do not believe in life after death, angels or spirits of any kind, Paul identifies himself as a Pharisee, and the son of a Pharisee, and says that it is because of his hope in life after death that he stands accused. This triggers a vehement argument between the two groups in the Sanhedrin, with the Pharisees defending Paul, and the conflict becomes so great that, fearing for Paul’s life again, the commandant has his soldiers go into the turmoil and forcibly rescue Paul and bring him back into the barracks (“the castle”).

93. Jesus Visits Paul, and the Murderous Jews Plot. (23:11-22)

That night Jesus appears, and calls him Paul (on the Damascus road Jesus called him Saul)¹⁶⁸. Standing next to Paul, Jesus assures him that all is well, and tells him that, as he has testified for Him in Jerusalem, he must also testify for Him in Rome. The following morning a group of more than forty zealous Jews take an

¹⁶⁶ Humility was not one of Paul’s greater virtues.

¹⁶⁷ This seems to be the same expression that Jesus used to insult the scribes and Pharisees, calling them “whited sepulchers.” Like a whitewashed tomb, He said, they looked good on the outside, but the inner reality was that they were like decaying corpses and all uncleanness (Matt 23:27).

¹⁶⁸ For a discussion of the name change, see “Saul’ Becomes ‘Paul’ - Why the Name Change?” in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

oath that they will neither eat nor drink until they have killed Paul. These men go to the Sanhedrin and make a proposal: they ask that the council reassemble, as if to further question Paul, and that, when he appears, they will kill him. Paul's nephew hears of their plan, tells Paul, and Paul asks the Roman commander to hear what the lad has to say. The commander, apparently a wise and caring man, takes the lad by the hand, takes him aside for privacy, and listens as the lad tells him of the plot. The commander cautions the boy to tell no one else of what he has told him, and sends him away.

94. Paul, Protected by Soldiers, Is Sent to Felix. (23:23-35)

The Roman commander, Claudius Lysias, immediately begins to make preparations to send Paul to Caesaria, to appear before Felix, Governor of Judaea. And he is taking no chances concerning Paul's safety, for he sends him with two centurions with 200 infantry soldiers, 70 horsemen and 200 spearmen¹⁶⁹. The escort, with a letter from the commander to Felix, takes Paul by night, departing at 9:00 PM ("the third hour of the night") as far as Antipatris, about half way to Caesaria. The next day most of the escort turns back to Jerusalem, leaving only the 70 horsemen to take Paul the rest of the way. This smaller, but very adequate, escort delivers Paul to Felix, with the explanatory letter. Felix has Paul locked up in Herod's judgment hall, to await the arrival of his accusers from Jerusalem.

NOTE: Those 40-plus would-be murderers, who vowed neither to eat nor drink until they had killed Paul, either broke their vow, or they died a terrible death. The former is the far more likely outcome.

95. Paul Before Felix. (24:1-21)

Five days later Ananias and his villains from the Sanhedrin arrive in Caesarea, bringing their champion lawyer/orator, one Tertullus, to argue their concoction of lies before Felix. Tertullus opens with flattery of Felix, about how wonderful it has been to live in peace and safety under his administration, and even this is a lie. Tertullus recites the predictable lies about Paul, who answers briefly, pointing out that the Jews who had falsely accused him in the Temple are not even present to testify.

96. Felix Trembles. (24:22-27)

Felix adjourns the hearing until Claudius Lysias, the Roman military commander at Jerusalem, can come to testify; in the interim, Paul is under house arrest, supervised and guarded by a centurion, free to go about the palace and receive visitors.

¹⁶⁹ "Two centurians," as used in v 23 means two commanders of units of about 100 soldiers each. Each such unit was called a "centuria," and the rank of the commander of a centuria was "centurian."

While waiting for Lysias to arrive, Felix, who has a Jewish wife, sends for Paul and asks him to explain his Christian faith¹⁷⁰. Felix and his wife apparently do this out of idle curiosity; Paul, however, always ready to proclaim the Good News, must have been thinking, "I thought you would never ask." He explains "righteousness, temperance (purity of life) and judgment to come"; finally Felix, apparently under conviction, can't take any more! Trembling with fear, he hurriedly dismisses Paul, saying he will hear more about it later; but he apparently never did.

Felix keeps Paul there for two years, hoping for a bribe, until he is replaced as governor by Porcius Festus¹⁷¹. Felix, as his parting gesture, wishing to please the Sanhedrin, keeps Paul "bound"¹⁷².

NOTES:

a Felix, an ex-slave who had been freed and made governor because of military exploits, was a notoriously wicked and corrupt man. He will keep Paul a prisoner there, unnecessarily, hoping for a large bribe; if so, he was to be disappointed. His wife, Drusilla, reportedly very beautiful, one of the wicked Herodian family, was the sister of Herod Agrippa II; she had left her first husband, a Syrian king, to marry Felix. They seem to have been a matched pair.

Josephus wrote that Felix was a corrupt, treacherous, and cruel man¹⁷³. Although Felix was elevated from the status of a slave to that of a king, his basic nature and base immorality remained unchanged. Tacitus, the Roman historian, described Felix as "a master of cruelty and lust who exercised the powers of a king with the spirit of a slave"¹⁷⁴.

b. Interestingly, Josephus wrote that this Drusilla's son by Felix, Agrippa, and his wife, died in the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius which destroyed Pompei and Herculaneum.¹⁷⁵

Of all of the multitudes who died as a result of the famous eruption of Vesuvius in 79 AD, the identities of only three are known: Agrippa, son of Felix and Drusilla, his wife, as mentioned above, and Pliny the Elder, the great Roman historian, who,

¹⁷⁰ Actually, the Herods, of which Drusilla was one, were not Jews; they were Edomites, descended from Esau and his pagan wives. The Romans established the Herods as the royal family to rule over the Jews; they followed the Jewish religion, but were not ethnic Jews. Drusilla, however, may have been a true Jewess, for Luke clearly refers to her this way in v 24, and he was a careful, meticulous historian.

¹⁷¹ Some commentators believe that during these two years Luke researched and wrote his gospel, and the early part of Acts. Perhaps he did.

¹⁷² The Greek word rendered "bound" in v 27 can mean kept in chains or other bonds; but it can also mean simply kept a prisoner in the general sense. In light of Paul's status as a Roman citizen, it is highly likely that this just means he continued to be held as a prisoner.

¹⁷³ Josephus, Antiquities, 20.7.1 and 8.5-7.

¹⁷⁴ Tacitus, *Historiae* 5.9.

¹⁷⁵ Josephus, Antiquities, 20.7.2.

seeking to observe the disaster more closely, ventured by boat too close to the flaming, smoking disaster ashore. He was an asthmatic, and died from inhaling the toxic gasses released from the volcano.

97. “I Appeal to Caesar.” (25:1-12)

After three days as the new governor of Judaea, Festus travels to Jerusalem, where the high priest and his cronies repeat their false charges against Paul, and ask that he be sent back to Jerusalem (so they can ambush Paul along the way and murder him). Festus declines to do this, but invites those of the Sanhedrin who wish to do so, to come back to Caesarea and make their charges against Paul. Ten days later they arrive in Caesarea and Paul is brought before Festus. The Jews repeat their lies concerning Paul (for which they have no evidence), all of which Paul denies. Festus, wishing to please the Sanhedrin, asks Paul if he is willing to be returned to Jerusalem, where Festus will hear the case fully. But Paul has had enough. He says that he is already standing before Caesar’s judgment seat, the proper place for him to be judged. He repeats the obvious fact that he is innocent, and refuses to be turned over to the corrupt Jewish leaders. Knowing his rights as a Roman citizen, Paul speaks four words that will guarantee his safe delivery to Rome: he declares, “I appeal to Caesar¹⁷⁶.” Festus, realizing that he has no choice in the matter now, says that since Paul has made this appeal, to Caesar he must go.

98. A Visit from King Agrippa and His Queen. (25:13-27)

Soon after this, King Herod Agrippa and his wife arrive in Caesarea for a visit with Festus. Festus tells them of Paul and all that has happened concerning him. Agrippa says that he would like to hear Paul’s story, and Festus is pleased, since Agrippa and his wife practice the Jewish religion and are knowledgeable concerning it. He believes that they will understand the matter, and can help him to know what to write in the document which must accompany Paul to Rome.

99. Paul before King Herod Agrippa. (26:1-24)

The following day, Paul is brought before Festus, Agrippa, and his wife. Paul recites in detail the story of his persecution of Christians, his conversion on the Damascus road, and then demonstrates the validity of the Christian faith, quoting the prophets¹⁷⁷. Festus gets more than he counted on! He becomes greatly agitated, and shouts that Paul is "beside himself" and that Paul's great learning has made him insane.

¹⁷⁶ Any Roman citizen who considered himself unfairly judged could request a personal audience before Caesar to be judged by him; if he so “appealed,” he must be granted this hearing, and Caesar would (theoretically) make final judgment, condemning or freeing him.

¹⁷⁷ In this recitation of his meeting with Jesus on the Damascus road Paul reveals that his entire escort had been struck to the ground (not just Paul), and that Jesus had spoken to him in Hebrew. These extremely interesting details are recorded nowhere else (26:14).

100. Agrippa is “Almost Persuaded.” (26:25-32)

Paul replies that he is not insane, but rather he is accurately reciting facts, and that all that he has said and done was predicted by the prophets. He also points out that none of these momentous events was done in secret ("done in a corner").

Then Paul addresses Agrippa, who has been listening carefully to all of this. He asks him if he believes the Jewish prophets, and then answers for him. He says that he knows that Agrippa both knows the Messianic prophecies and believes them. At this Agrippa declares that Paul has almost persuaded him to become a Christian. Paul replies that he wishes that Agrippa and all who are there, who hear his voice, would be not only almost persuaded, but fully persuaded, to be Christians, as he is, except for his bonds.

At this point Festus, King Agrippa and his wife, and the attendants, stand up, ending the conversation. Going aside, they discuss Paul's situation, and agree that Paul is guilty of nothing. Agrippa says that if Paul had not appealed to Caesar he could be set free.

NOTE: Commentators are divided as to whether or not Agrippa was sincere in saying that he was “almost persuaded.” Some believe that he was being sarcastic; others believe that he was sincere, and call his words “the saddest words ever spoken.” What Paul said to Agrippa in reply (v 29) suggests that he was sincere.

101. Setting Sail for Rome. (27:1-8)

Paul, with other prisoners, guarded by a centurion named Julius, sets sail for Rome. Paul is accompanied by Luke and a Macedonian Christian from Thessalonica named Aristarchus. The following day they put in at Sidon where Julius kindly allows Paul to go ashore and visit his friends there, rest, and be cared for by them. From there they follow the coast, sailing north of Cyprus to escape contrary winds, and then sail past Cilicia and Pamphilia to Lycia, where they land at the port of Myra. There they transfer to a ship of Alexandria which is bound for Italy; adventures lie ahead for all aboard the ship.

They sail with difficulty, making slow progress, for the winds are against them. They pass Cnidus on the mainland of southwest Roman Asia, and then turn west toward Italy. To escape the contrary winds, they sail south of the island of Crete, landing at a place called Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea.

102. Into the Storm. (27:9-20)

The season is well advanced, they are behind schedule, and the feast of Yom Kippur (Atonement) is past. It is early October, and sailing is already dangerous. Paul urges that they winter over where they are, and warns that if they sail on they will suffer much loss. But the harbor is not ideal, and the owner of the ship and the pilot disagree, reject Paul's advice, and they sail for a harbor farther west on

the island called Phoenice. The wind becomes gentle, and they sail; but soon a seasonal storm called Euroclydon arises, blowing them away from Crete¹⁷⁸.

Running south of the small island of Clauda in heavy seas, they manage to haul the ship's small boat, which has been towed, on board and secure it. Fearing that they would be driven into marshes on the North African coast, they drop sails and allow the ship to be blown along by the wind. As the storm continues, they begin to lighten the ship by throwing cargo overboard. The 3rd day they throw overboard the ship's gear and furnishings. After many days in the raging storm, without seeing either the Sun or the stars, most of them abandon hope of surviving. *NOTE: As noted in the Introductory Material of this study guide, one of the unique features of the Bible is the amount of details, not only in the prophecies, but also in names of places and people. This is particularly true of the writings of Luke, the careful, meticulous, historian, both in his gospel and--especially--in Acts. Here, in the narrative of Chapt 27, is an excellent example of this.*

103. An Encouraging Word from an Angel. (27:21-26)

The men are exhausted and hungry, but Paul has good news for them. Reminding them that he had advised against leaving the port at Fair Havens (even in this terrible situation, Paul's humility and modesty fail him), Paul announces that an angel visited him in the night and assured him that he and all aboard the ship will survive. The ship will be lost, however, and they will be cast ashore on an island. We are not told how the others reacted, but surely it gave them some renewed hope.

104. Paul Again Brings Order. (27:27-38)

On the 14th night, as the ship continues to be blown about "in Adria," about midnight the water begins to get increasingly shallow, indicating that they are approaching land¹⁷⁹. The crew casts out four anchors astern, trying to hold the ship from running aground, and wish for the dawn. The crewmen decide to launch the small boat, pretending to put out more anchors, and abandon the ship; but Paul reports it to the Centurion, who has the lowering lines cut, and the small boat drifts away. No one will leave the ship.

Again Paul speaks to the others, urging them to eat. He takes bread, breaks it, gives thanks for it, and eats. Encouraged, the rest also eat. Strengthened and encouraged by this, the crew further lightens the ship, throwing the cargo of wheat overboard. There are 276 men on the ship.

105. Shipwreck. (27:39-44)

¹⁷⁸ The Greek word rendered "tempestuous" in v 14 is "tuphonikos," the word from which the English word "typhoon" is derived. This was a seriously bad storm! Today this seasonal storm is called a "Levanter," for the name given to the eastern Mediterranean region, "Levant."

¹⁷⁹ Luke's use of the word "Adria" in v 27 simply means that they were in the southern end of the Adriatic Sea.

At dawn land is sighted, with a stream emptying into the sea. The crew hoists the main sail, activates the ship's rudder and steer for the mouth of the stream, hoping to sail into quiet water; however, caught between two currents they are driven ashore, missing the stream. With the bow stuck, the stern breaks up in the surf, and the soldiers wish to kill the prisoners to prevent escape; but the centurion, wishing to protect Paul, forbids it¹⁸⁰. He orders all who can swim to enter the water first, and for the rest to cling to timbers and pieces of the ship, and as Paul had predicted, they all make it ashore alive. Paul's prophecy of v 22 is perfectly fulfilled.

106. A Warm Reception and Snakebite. (28:1-6)

Paul and the rest find that they are on the island of Malta; they are safe, but wet, cold and exhausted. Chilly Autumn rain makes them even more miserable, but the barbarian natives are very kind to them, and they build a fire to warm them. Paul gathers an armload of sticks, places it on the fire, and gets an unpleasant surprise. As he places the sticks on the fire, a small, poisonous snake, which had been in the armload of sticks unnoticed, emerges and bites Paul, fastening on his hand. The superstitious natives, seeing this, assume that Paul is a murderer. Speaking among themselves, they agree that, although Paul escaped the shipwreck, Justitia, the Roman goddess of justice, has sent the snake to execute him. Paul, however, shakes the viper from his hand and into the fire, and is unharmed by the venom. The natives, expecting him to sicken quickly and die, are increasingly amazed when he shows no ill effects from the snakebite. Realizing finally that the venom has had no effect on him, they now decide that he is a god.

NOTES:

a. The identity of this snake is disputed; but it was almost certainly a viper, as Luke recorded, a very common snake in southern Europe and the Mediterranean. It was probably Vipera aspis, also called an asp. A closely related species is believed to have been used by Cleopatra to kill herself. This Vipera aspis, related to the cobras, is a small snake of the viper family. It is usually only 12 and 24 inches long, and very slender, less than one inch thick at its widest point. When bitten the victim typically experiences immediate, acute, spreading pain, followed by swelling from edema and discoloration of the skin. Death is caused by stopping the heart.

Notice that the natives expected Paul to swell and die (v 6). These small, slender snakes, when stiff and sluggish from the cold, rainy weather, could easily be overlooked in a pile of dead branches and twigs. Once awakened by the heat of the fire, its immediate reaction would be to strike; and Paul's immediate

¹⁸⁰ To allow even one prisoner to escape would place the soldiers in danger of execution.

reaction would be to shake it off. Paul was protected from the venom, which had no effect on him. This appears to be an example of the promise of protection by Jesus in Mk 16:18. Although this viper is still found on other Mediterranean islands, it is now extinct on Malta, due to deforestation and cultivation of the land.

b. Notice that in v 3 Luke wrote that the viper "fastened" itself on Paul's hand. Unlike the pit vipers (rattlesnakes, copperheads and water moccasins), which have long fangs, strike, bury the fangs in the victim, inject the venom like hypodermic needles, and the damage is done in an instant, the vipers have no fangs. Their venom is in glands at the base of numerous small, sharp, teeth. Like the coral snake, they must bite and hold the bite for several seconds, squeezing, while the venom runs around the teeth and enters the skin.

Here, in the obscure clause "fastened itself," is another remarkable example of the details recorded by Luke. To refresh your memory concerning this characteristic of Luke's written records you may wish to read the story of the great archeologist, Sir William Ramsay, in the Introductory Material, under "Archeology and the Bible."

107. Healing the Sick on Malta. (28:7-11)

The "chief man of the island," a man named Publius, receives the shipwrecked group hospitably and makes them his guests for three days. The father of Publius is found to be seriously ill, with fever and dysentery, and Paul visits the man. He lays his hands on him, prays, and the man is healed. After this is made known, others who are sick are brought to him, and he heals them. The Maltese are so grateful that they shower Paul's party with gifts and honors. After three months on Malta, the shipwrecked group is provided with food and other things for their continuation of the trip. They sail away on a ship from Alexandria which had wintered on the island; it has the figures of Castor and Pollux on the bow¹⁸¹.

NOTE: *Publius ("chief man of the island") was probably the Roman procurator (governor) of Malta. Roman martyrologies (ancient lists of martyrs) say that Publius became a Christian, was the first bishop of Malta, was later Bishop of Athens and was martyred. Jerome also records a tradition that Publius was martyred¹⁸².*

108. From Malta to Puteoli. (28:12-14)

¹⁸¹ In Greek mythology Castor and Pollux were twin sons of Jupiter; they were taken to Heaven and became stars in the constellation Gemini. Their images were believed by pagans to bring good luck to seamen. Alexandria, on the north coast of Africa, founded by, and named for, Alexander the Great, was very much a Greek city.

¹⁸² Unger, Merrill F.: Unger's Bible Dictionary, "Publius" p 900.

From Malta they sail to the port of Syracuse on the southeast coast of the island of Sicily, where they lie over for three days¹⁸³. From Syracuse they sail to Rhegium, on the tip ("toe") of the "boot" of Italy. After one day there, with a south wind at their backs, they sail up the west coast of Italy and land at Puteoli¹⁸⁴. At Puteoli there is a group of believers, and Paul and his party stay with them for a week, and then continue the trip, overland, toward Rome.

NOTES:

a. We must wonder how the gospel had reached Puteoli? Perhaps some of the thousands of converts at Pentecost had brought the gospel back to Italy. There were pilgrims there from Rome, both Jews and Gentile proselytes (2:10). This is also the probable explanation for the Christians who will soon meet the party on the Appian Way.

b. By this time Paul must have acquired great favor with the centurion for him to allow a seven-day lie-over at Puteoli, just so Paul could have an extended visit with his new Christian friends. Under normal circumstances, he would have allowed no unnecessary delay, for his assignment was to deliver Paul to Caesar as soon as possible. Could it be that, observing Paul during the storm and shipwreck, and in the healing miracles on Malta, that the centurion became a Christian? It is an appealing possibility; I hope he is in Heaven.

109. To Rome at Last. (28:15-16)

Paul's party, with its guards, travels northward toward Rome on the famed Appian Way. News of their coming has preceded them, and when they reach the Forum of Appius (Appii), and, later, at the Three Taverns, they are met by Roman Christians who then travel the rest of the way to Rome with them¹⁸⁵. This pleases and encourages Paul. Arriving at Rome the centurion delivers the rest of the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul is allowed to live alone, in his own lodgings, with one soldier to guard him.

NOTE: *The famed Appian Way was the first major road connecting Rome with southern Italy. Originally running from the Forum in Rome to Capua, north of Naples, it eventually was extended all the way to Brindisi on the southeastern coast of Italy. It was a military road, named for the builder of the original section (Rome to Capua), Appius Claudius Caecus. Sections of it still exist, in almost as perfect condition as when the road was built. It is remarkably well designed and*

¹⁸³ Syracuse was one of the most famous and prosperous cities in the ancient World, and the capital of Sicily. Today it is the capital of the province of Syracuse, an area rich in Greek history and culture. Syracuse is the birthplace of Archimedes.

¹⁸⁴ The name of Puteoli today is Potzuoli. In many ways, the port is unchanged since Paul landed there. The stone pier where Paul landed has subsided, and is under a few feet of water, but can easily be seen in the clear water.

¹⁸⁵ The Forum of Appius was about 50 miles south of Rome, and the Three Taverns were about 30 miles south of Rome.

paved with flat stones, so perfectly fit together that in places they appear to have grown together. Some of the mile markers still survive. Paul and Peter are believed to have been originally buried beside it, not far from the city, after they were martyred.

110. Paul Speaks with the Leading Roman Jews. (28:17-22)

After three days in Rome, Paul sends for the leading local Jews and, when they come, he tells them how he has come to be there. He tells them that it is because of questions of the Messiah (“the hope of Israel”) that the Sanhedrin turned against him. They tell him (somewhat surprisingly) that they have received no negative information from Israel concerning him. But they say that they would like to hear his position concerning the Christians (“this sect”), and say that what they have heard about it is all negative.

111. Paul Declares the Good News to the Roman Jews. (28:23-29)

A day is set for the Jewish leaders to return, and they assemble in Paul’s apartment, bringing many others with them¹⁸⁶. Paul presents the case for Jesus as the Messiah, quoting from the law and the prophets, and the meeting lasts all day and into the evening. At the end some are convinced, and some are not. Paul closes by quoting Isaiah 6:9-10, and tells them that God is sending the message of the Messiah to the Gentiles, who hear it, and readily accept it. His Jewish guests go away arguing about it among themselves.

112. Two Years of Ministry in Rome. (28:30-31)

For two whole years Paul receives visitors in his rented lodgings (“hired house”), teaching and preaching concerning the Kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus. Although under house arrest, he is not molested or hindered in any way¹⁸⁷.

And here Luke ends his superb history of the early Church.

EPILOGUE

From this point onward, concerning Paul’s life, our only sources of information are his letters, the writings of the Ante-Nicene Fathers, Eusebius and other ancient historians, and tradition. At best, the result is uncertain; but the following summary probably represents the majority opinion.

Most commentators, and other students of this mystery, theorize that, at the end of the two comfortable years of house arrest in Rome, Paul seems to have had a hearing before Nero, pleading his own case. In this trial the Lord stood by him,

¹⁸⁶ Paul’s rented home must have been spacious, to accommodate such a crowd; this would be in keeping with what seems to be the special treatment he received during the last part of the trip to Rome, and once he arrived there.

¹⁸⁷ Evidence contained in the letters to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and to Philemon, indicates that Paul wrote these letters during the two-year period of house arrest in Rome. These four letters (books) are often referred to as the “prison epistles.”

strengthening him, and Paul “was delivered from the mouth of the lion” and released by Nero (AD 62)¹⁸⁸. Upon his release, Paul returned to visit the churches he had established, traveling widely in Greece, Macedonia and Asia Minor for about 3 years (AD 62-65).

Then, for reasons unknown, Nero had Paul re-arrested, returned as a prisoner to Rome, and imprisoned with Peter in the cruel Mamertine Prison. His second imprisonment was as harsh and cruel as his first had been comfortable and pleasant. Paul’s second letter to Timothy reveals that he was in chains, treated “like an evildoer” (a malefactor or criminal). Some of his friends deserted him; it seems that only Luke was still with him constantly. There is no record of the second and final stage of Paul’s trial--only that it ended in martyrdom, probably AD 66 or 67. **(There is at least one exterior photograph of the Mamertine Prison available to be used here--Susan showed it to the class on her computer)**

Combining all that is found in the writings of the Ante-Nicene Fathers and ancient historians, the following scenario for Paul’s final days seems likely. Nero commanded the execution of both Paul and Peter, that Paul be beheaded, and that Peter be crucified. Paul was first to die, beheaded as befit a Roman citizen. However, insane Nero first had him tortured, which was entirely a violation of Roman law¹⁸⁹. Soon after Paul’s martyrdom Peter was crucified; and, by his request, was crucified upside down, considering himself unworthy to die the death of his Lord.

At first Peter was buried beside Paul, at a place called “ad Catacumbus,” on the Appian Way, and their graves became a gathering place for Christians. They were later moved to prevent their desecration during the Valerian persecution in AD 257. Peter’s remains appear to have been re-buried under what is now St. Peter’s Basilica; and, in recent years, Archeologists believe that they have found and identified Peter’s remains there. The location of Paul’s remains is known but to God.

¹⁸⁸ II Timothy 4:17.

¹⁸⁹ Tertullian (ca AD 160-220), early Christian theologian, Roman lawyer, and writer, wrote that Nero was the first emperor to persecute Christians; and he added, sarcastically, that it was actually an honor to be condemned to death by Nero, “for whoever knows him can understand that nothing was condemned by Nero unless it was something of great excellence.”