

The
ACTS of the APOSTLES
and
AFTERWARDS

by

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The Unfolding Purpose of God
On Reading the Bible
The Interpretation of Scripture
The Early Centuries and the Truth
The Kingdom of God in Heaven & on Earth
The Early and Pastoral Epistles of Paul
The Galatian and Roman epistles of Paul
Letters from Prison
etc., etc.

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A.V.	Authorized Version
R.V.	Revised Version
R.S.V.	Revised Standard Version
A.S.V.	American Standard Version

Where a Scripture reference contains a word or words printed in *italics*, this is the author's way of emphasizing a thought.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

The Acts of the Apostles is one of the key books of the New Testament. Without it we should be at a loss to place the epistles, and to trace the purpose of God Who 'works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will' (Ephesians 1:11). We have therefore given it a verse by verse exposition. It is easy to miss the main object of this important book and to get side-tracked. But we have tried to avoid this and keep close to Luke's history which deals with the beginning of Christianity and the development of the purpose of God which can be traced throughout the Bible and is centred on Christ and His Kingdom. The Gospels deal with what 'Jesus *began* to do and to teach' concerning this kingdom (Acts 1:1), and are followed by what He *continued* to do and teach in the Acts through the work of the Holy Spirit and the instrumentality of Peter and Paul and those associated with them

The author wishes to convey his gratitude to the friends who have assisted so ably in typing, proofing and making the indexes. May all who read the book come to a knowledge of Him 'Whom to know is life eternal', with endless joy and blessing to follow.

Errata

page 45, line 27	'Pilot' should read 'Pilate'
page 222, line 15	'Agrippa' should read 'Festus'
page 252, line 20	'posses' should read 'possess'

INTRODUCTION.

When it was written, the book we are considering was known as *The Acts* by early Christian leaders such as Origen, Tertullian, Eusebius and others. About the middle of the second century it became known as *The Acts of the Apostles*. It was part of an account of the history of Christian origins. The first part was known as the *Gospel according to Luke* whose author was Luke, 'the beloved physician', and at the beginning, these two Volumes almost certainly circulated as one complete work. Soon, after the publication of the Fourth Gospel, the first part of Luke's writing was put together with the other three canonical Gospels, forming one Volume, and the second part of Luke's writing circulated by itself as we have it today.

The story is not really the Acts of the Apostles, for only three of the original twelve apostles appear in the narrative, namely Peter, James and John, and the latter two are only mentioned. The book of the Acts records the Acts of the Holy Spirit through Peter and Paul, who continued to do 'all that Jesus began both to do and to teach' (Acts 1:1). Peter is practically dropped from the story after the conversion of Cornelius.

Later, Paul's epistles were collected together and the two collections were known as *The Gospel* and *The Apostle*. There is no doubt that the *Acts* played a very important part in relating these two volumes or collections; and without it we should have great difficulty in placing the books of the New Testament, or of understanding the purpose of God after the resurrection of Christ.

There has been practically universal agreement that Luke was the human author of the third *Gospel* and the

Acts of the Apostles. As to the purpose of his writing, we need not guess, but read the prologue to his Gospel :

‘Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, ²just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eye-witnesses and servants of the Word. ³Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught’ (Luke 1:1-4).

He was evidently not an eyewitness of the earlier events recorded in his Gospel, but he certainly had access to the information which such witnesses could supply. He informs us that many had attempted to give a written record of what happened at the birth of Christ and afterwards, and we can well understand the difficulties that Christians had in sorting out all this material when the canon of the New Testament was being formed. We believe that the superintendence of the Holy Spirit must have worked here so that the completed Word of God did not contain erroneous matter. This was as much a miracle as the writing of the holy Scriptures.

Luke claims that he made careful and thorough research for the facts contained in his Gospel and that they were arranged in proper sequence. For the later part of his narrative (the Acts) he could draw on his own experience.

His accuracy as an historian has been clearly and abundantly demonstrated by the research and writings of Sir William Ramsay. In his early life Ramsay believed that the Acts belonged to the middle of the Second Century A.D., but as he advanced in his archaeological discoveries in Asia Minor, this, together with his wide and accurate knowledge of the life of the Roman Empire, led him to conclude that it must have been written in the First Century with full knowledge.

One of the most impressive facts which proves Luke's accuracy is related to the titles of the various officials in the Roman Empire which he mentions in his writings. The titles of provincial governors changed suddenly if the status of provinces was changed, but Luke never makes a mistake here. He was absolutely trustworthy in all the points where he can be checked, and this being so we should not assume that he is less reliable where we cannot test his accuracy.

Luke has been criticised on the ground of real or fancied disagreement with Josephus. But Josephus is not more distinguished for accuracy, and where they disagree Luke is as likely to be right as Josephus.

There can be no doubt that Luke was an exceptional man. Dr Plummer describes him as 'the most versatile of all the New Testament writers'. He was at once a medical doctor, a poet, a traveller, a missionary, a devoted friend, a great and reliable historian, and a great Christian.

DATE. While some scholars advocate a late date, others give good reason for an earlier date. This is discussed in the author's introduction to the Gospel of Luke. Professors F.F.Bruce and A.T.Robertson and others give A.D.61-63 as a more likely date. It was possible for Luke to have written both volumes towards the end of the two years of Paul's imprisonment at Rome (Acts 28:30).

It is not easy to say in a few words what Luke's object was in writing this book. It is not the Acts of *all* the apostles. Apart from Peter and John, little is told of any of them after chapter three. Peter himself disappears from the narrative after chapter fifteen. Paul is not one of the twelve apostles, although some think he ought to be numbered amongst them. He dominates the atmosphere of the Acts from chapter nine onwards.

It should be noticed that Luke's Gospel stresses the importance of the Gentile, who is seen in a favourable light, while the Acts gives us a careful account of the spread of God's truth over the Gentile world with Israel's opposition to it all. It is a summing up of some forty years after the crucifixion, showing how Israel failed again in the purpose of God, how the Gentile responded, and finally the laying aside of the chosen nation, in blindness and unbelief, who had dominated the scene, by God's appointment, since the time of Jacob.

This ended the possibility of the setting up at that time of the Messianic Kingdom foreshadowed in the Old Testament. To miss this is to miss one of the main reasons for the writing of the Acts of the Apostles. The Gospels inform us of what the Lord Jesus said and did in His ministry to Israel. His own words assure us that He was 'sent only to the lost sheep of Israel' (Matt 15:24) and He confined the ministry of the apostles to Israel, the chosen nation, avoiding any contact with the Gentiles (Matt. 10:5-8).

This is inexplicable unless the earthly kingdom of the Old Testament is in view. Not that Gentiles were to be permanently excluded, for that kingdom finally embraces the whole earth when the knowledge of the Lord *shall cover the earth* 'as the waters cover the sea' (Isa. 11:9) and the Lord Jesus will become more than the King of Israel, namely the '*King over all the earth*' (Zech. 14:9 A.V.) and then will the plan of God revealed to Abraham come to pass, that his seed should be a blessing to 'all families of the earth' (Gen. 12:1-3 A.V.).

If the Gospels record the acts and sayings of the Lord Jesus, then the Acts continue the theme by the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit, so much so that many feel that a more fitting title for Luke's book would be the 'Acts of the Holy Spirit'.

CHAPTER ONE

'In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ²until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles He had chosen. ³After His suffering, He showed Himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that He was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. ⁴On one occasion, while He was eating with them, He gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift My Father promised, which you have heard Me speak about. ⁵For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit."' (Acts 1:1-5).

Luke commences by referring to his former book, namely the third Gospel, and the last verses of the Gospel overlap the opening verses of the Acts (Luke 24:36-53; Acts 1:1-14). A general comparison of these two portions of Scripture would take a great deal of space, so we use the admirable summing up of C.H.Welch* :

*See *The Apostle of the Reconciliation*, obtainable from *The Berean Publishing Trust*.

Luke 24:36-53 (A.V.)Acts 1:1-14 (A.V.)

Many infallible proofs.

‘And as they thus spake, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them and saith unto them, "Peace be unto you". But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And He said unto them, "Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; handle Me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have". And when He had thus spoken He showed them His hands and His feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, He said unto them, "Have ye here any meat?" And they gave Him a piece of broiled fish, and of an honeycomb, and He took it and did eat before them’.

‘ ... the apostles whom He had chosen: to whom also He showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days’.

(It will be seen that what Luke wrote in fuller detail, Acts summarizes under one head. This is exactly what we do when referring to previous correspondence on any subject).

The Lord's words to His apostles

'And He said unto them, "These are the words that I spake unto you while I was yet with you; that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning Me. Then opened He their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures"'.

'Speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God'.

(Notice how these two aspects of truth are brought together in the last verse of Acts 'preaching the KINGDOM OF GOD, and teaching those things which concern the LORD JESUS CHRIST' — an unobtrusive connection such as delighted Paley. Further, the fact of their opened understanding shows their question in Acts 1:6 to be right and fitting, as also Acts 1:16-26).*

The Commission

'Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem and ye are witnesses of these things'.

'Ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth'.

*W.Paley was a great Christian philosopher (1743-1805) whose books are still valued today.

The Enduement

‘Behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high’.

‘Commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of Me ... Ye shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days hence ... Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you’.

The Ascension

‘And it came to pass while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven’.

‘And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight’.

(Notice how each supplements the other. The Gospel tells us ‘He was parted from them’ but does not say how. Acts adds the information concerning ‘the cloud’. Acts also adds statements regarding the angels and the second coming of the Lord).

The Apostles' return

'And they worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and were continually in the Temple praising and blessing God'.

'And they returned unto Jerusalem from the Mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication'.

— o — o — o — o — o — o — o —

Surely the most wonderful experience the apostles ever enjoyed was to have the inestimable privilege of hearing the Lord Jesus interpret the written Word! The greatest and absolutely infallible Teacher expounds the Word of God and that for over a month! It could be said that although this was true, the apostles, being human and fallible, might have failed to understand what He taught. Luke, at the close of his Gospel, shows that this was not so. He quotes the Lord Jesus as saying :

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

⁴⁵Then He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.' (Luke 24:44,45).

And so, not only did they hear the greatest Teacher interpret the Old Testament, but they clearly understood what He said, because He gave them that understanding!

As a result of this wonderful teaching, they asked Him a question, and this was not likely to be a foolish one, when their minds had been enlightened.

'So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to *restore* the kingdom to Israel?"' (Acts 1:6).

Now it is here that expositors can make their own stumbling block. They assume that the apostles, in using the word 'kingdom', meant just a vast political power and nothing more. The point at issue is this, the kingdom that the apostles mentioned and the one which the Lord explained to them was the *Messianic kingdom of the Old Testament*. This cannot be gainsaid. So we ask the question, is this kingdom just a political one bolstered up with great power, or is it a spiritual one? To answer this in detail would require a large volume, for the Old Testament is so rich in its description of this kingdom. But we can settle the question by noting what was the purpose of God in choosing (electing) Israel. We shall have then the very centre of God's plan for His kingdom on this earth.

Let us turn to Exodus 19:3-6. God said to Moses :

³ ... "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: ⁴'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. ⁵Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession. Although the whole earth is Mine, ⁶you will be for Me a *kingdom of priests and a holy nation*'. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

Later on, in the book of Deuteronomy we read :

'He (God) has declared that He will *set you in praise, fame and honour high above all the nations He has made and that you will be a people holy to the LORD your God, as He promised.*' (Deut. 26:19).

No wonder the Psalmist says :

¹⁹He (God) has revealed His word to Jacob, His laws and decrees to Israel. ²⁰*He has done this for no other nation; they do not know His laws. Praise the LORD.*' (Psa. 147:19,20).

Now we ask a question concerning these two Old Testament Scriptures. Do they describe a political system

backed up with earthly power? They certainly do not; rather they stress a spiritual goal for the nation of Israel. The purpose of God in choosing them was that they should be a *priestly kingdom and a holy nation*. These are spiritual values, not political ones, and it was only as Israel manifested them in action, that God would exalt them in position above all the other nations. At the same time it was true that the LORD showered upon them material blessings (Deut. 28:1-13) and planned to give them the land He promised to Abraham with its geographical boundaries from the Nile to the Euphrates (Gen. 15:18). God clearly stated that this land was His gift, not only to Abraham, but also *to his seed forever* (Gen. 13:14-17; 15:17,18 A.V.). This was the *basis for His earthly kingdom* and God intended that this holy nation should be priests who would manifest the holy character of God and spread the knowledge of His redemptive love to the ends of the earth (see Paul's summary of this purpose recorded in Acts 13:44-47). In this way the knowledge of God would cover the earth 'as the waters cover the sea' (Isa. 11:1-12). But both the Old Testament and the New Testament record the failure of Israel to realize the will of God for them. At the same time we must not forget that God never left Himself without a witness. There was always a faithful remnant who remained true to His will. Elijah had to learn that (Rom. 11:2-5; 1 Kings 19:17,18). At the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus, Israel, when convicted and converted, will find that all their failure has been covered by the New Covenant of grace that God has made with the nation (Jer. 31:31-37). *And so all Israel will be saved* (Rom. 11:25-29), and at last they will realize the purpose that God has marked out for them.

Thus, when due regard is given to what the Old Testament reveals concerning the rule and the knowledge of God over the earth, it is neither wholly material nor wholly spiritual in its final manifestation. It is a combination of both, *the spiritual coming first and foremost*. The effect of this kingdom over the whole earth,

with its spiritual knowledge of God world-wide, is bound to lead to literal and material action and blessing. Sin will be restrained; armaments with all their fearful outworking will be abolished and world peace will be experienced at last. This is evidently the first thing that will result when the Prince of Peace returns (Zech. 9:9,10; Isa. 2:1-4).

In view of all this, we come back to Acts chapter one and ask, what was the kingdom the apostles enquired about and its dating? We can say absolutely certainly that, with their opened understanding of the Old Testament given by the Lord, it certainly was not a *political one*, for such a kingdom is unknown in the Word of God. How expositors can say that it was because of their political ideas that they asked this question passes our comprehension. The only kingdom that is known in the Old Testament concerning which Christ gave them correct understanding was the Messianic kingdom so graphically described, especially in the prophets. He did not correct them in their conception of the kingdom, for its truth had been the subject of His revelation to the eleven for over a month. It was *its timing* He did not reveal. He said :

"It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority." (Acts 1:7).

We may not fully understand why the Lord said this, but there is one reason that becomes obvious when one sees the gracious purpose for Israel that is unfolded in the Acts. Many expositors teach that after the climax sin of crucifying their Messiah and Saviour they were rejected by God, and from that point we have a revelation of the church, the Body of Christ. But this popular teaching contradicts Scripture. The epistle to the Romans was the last letter Paul wrote during the Acts period. In it he asks the question :

'I ask then: Did God reject His people (that is, Israel)? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. ²God did not reject His people, whom He foreknew.' (Rom. 11:1,2).

This was in spite of their being 'a disobedient and obstinate people.' (Rom. 10:21).

A little while later, the apostle states that it is, 'because of the *hope of Israel* that I am bound with this chain' (Acts 28:20). So not only had Israel not been cast off by God, but their hope was still possible of realisation. Before King Agrippa Paul stated this very thing :

"6" And now it is because of my hope in *what God has promised our fathers* that I am on trial today. 7This is the promise *our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled* as they earnestly serve God day and night." (Acts 26:6,7).

What God promised to the fathers of Israel related to *the land* given to them by God and *the seed* to inhabit that land. It is therefore part of the basic plan of God for His earthly kingdom and has nothing to do with the Body of Christ and its super-heavenly destiny.

In the verses from Romans that we have quoted, the apostle states that the failure of Israel was foreknown by God and that means that God was not taken by surprise by this failure. In spite of this we shall see that in the mercy and patience of God, Israel is going to have another opportunity of believing and receiving the kingdom message that had been so clearly sounded by the Lord Jesus in His earthly ministry, and also by His forerunner, John the Baptist (Matt. 3:1,2; Mark 1:14,15).

All this is stressed by Peter in his important address to his nation recorded in Acts three, to which we shall give careful attention when we reach that point. In His matchless wisdom Christ did not answer the apostles' question as to the *time* of the restoration of Israel to the important part that this nation plays in the setting up of the kingdom on earth which the Lord Jesus referred to in His prayer: 'Thy kingdom come (it was not here yet). *Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven*' (Matt. 6:10 A.V.). The apostles were not wrong in linking their knowledge to the kingdom of the Old Testament, for it was this that the Lord

had expounded and explained to them, and there was no other kingdom at that time for them to believe anyway.

Once again Israel were to be commanded to repent and turn to God, so that this kingdom could be set up. Had the Lord stated to the apostles that Israel would still refuse and harden their hearts, this offer of mercy would have been emptied of meaning.

An all-wise God did not command Israel to repent and at the same time reveal that they would not do so! Hence the Lord stated that He could not reveal the *time* when this kingdom would be realised.

There was no doubt about its coming to pass as the Old Testament foretold in much detail and in no sense did the later revelation of the Body of Christ with its heavenly destiny fulfil these prophecies. All this is why the Lord said to the apostles :

"It is not for you to know *the times or dates* the Father has set by His own authority." (Acts 1:7).

He goes on to say :

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8).

Just as the Lord Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and power at His baptism (Acts 10:38), so His apostles were now to have the same experience, enabling them to be true witnesses and so carry on the work. The Lord had said to them that they should be His witnesses (John 15:27). They doubtless remembered that their nation, Israel, was called to be a witness for God (Isa. 43:10; 44:8), and this is what they should have been to the whole earth (Acts 13:47).

In the same way the apostles in Acts 1 were commissioned by the Lord and empowered by the Holy Spirit and then to witness at Jerusalem, God's city, destined

to be the earthly centre of God's kingdom; then in ever widening circles, Judea, Samaria, and finally to the whole of mankind, for, as we have seen, when fully realised, this kingdom will extend over the whole earth, giving a knowledge of salvation and going on to experience the righteous and wonderful rule of Christ, Who will then be 'king over the whole earth' (Zech. 14:9).

God still needs faithful witnesses today, to all His revealed truth for the present age.

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

¹⁰They were looking intently up into the sky as He was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹"Men of Galilee", they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven." (Acts 1:9-11).

The apostles saw the Lord Jesus go heavenwards and no further appearances occurred such as they had had during the forty days. Just as at the Transfiguration, a cloud hid Him from them (Mark 9:2-7), and this reminds us of His own words concerning His *parousia*, His Second Coming, when He said, 'then shall they see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory' (Mark 13:26 A.V.) and also what He said to the high priest at His trial, 'ye shall see the Son of Man ... coming in (with) the clouds of heaven' (Mark 14:62 A.V.).

Two men appear who are obviously angels and they tell them that the Lord would return in just the same way as they had seen Him go. This and the Lord's words for ever cancel the idea that the Second Advent will be fulfilled spiritually and Christ will not be seen at His return. But, although He had left them physically, they had His promise that He would be with them right to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20), so they would not be alone.

¹²Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. ¹³When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.' (Acts 1:12-14).

It is quite possible that this was the house of Mary the mother of John Mark, where, later on, the disciples met for prayer (Acts 12:12). Luke gives the names of the apostles, which are identical with Luke 6:14, but in a different order. Of course the name of Judas Iscariot is absent. The name of Judas the son of James is added to distinguish him from Judas Iscariot. He is to be identified with Thaddaeus (Lebbaeus A.V.) of Mark and Matthew; Simon the Zealot is Simon the Canaanite of Matthew 10:4 and Mark 3:18. Early in the first century the Zealots were the militant wing of Jewish nationalism and the title evidently stuck to him after conversion.

It is interesting to note that Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus, was there. She had come out from the shadow of death, and how precious the promise of the angels must have been to her and she would also remember the prophecy of Simeon. She joined in worship and prayer with the apostles :

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

¹⁸(With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. ¹⁹Everyone in Jerusalem

heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood).

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

"‘May his place be deserted; let there be no-one to dwell in it,’

and,

"‘May another take his place of leadership.’"

(Acts 1:15-20).

Peter now takes the leading place amongst the apostles and the faithful followers of Christ. He was concerned about filling the place that the defection of Judas Iscariot had caused. He points out that his suicide had been foretold in the Old Testament (Psa. 69:25; Psa. 109:8).

The Lord Jesus, in prophesying concerning His Second Coming and the setting up of the glory of His kingdom, said to the disciples :

"‘I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.’" (Matt. 19:28).

This is evidently an important feature of His coming back to the earth — *twelve thrones*, but one was missing! This must therefore be remedied, so Peter continues:

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

²³So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. ²⁴Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen ²⁵to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs." ²⁶Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.' (Acts 1:21-26).

The point at issue was the capability of being a witness to the whole of the Lord's earthly ministry and this is confirmed by the Lord Himself to the disciples :

"And you also must testify, *for you have been with Me from the beginning.*" (John 15:27).

This rules out the apostle Paul, in spite of what some Bible teachers say about Paul being the most suitable person to fill the place of Judas. Paul never considered himself to be one of the Twelve, nor did he consider his hope bound up with them and their work. Peter had already said that their choice must rest on someone who had been with them the whole time, beginning with the baptism of John to the time of the Ascension. Only such could be a true witness of the whole of the earthly ministry of Christ.

Two people fulfilled this condition, Joseph Barsabbas and Mathias, and so the brethren prayed that the Lord would make His choice and for this they cast lots.

This is another apostolic mistake according to some teachers, but this was not a kind of fortune telling, but a method God had devised in the Old Testament to indicate His will as the books of Leviticus and Numbers show. In addition we have :

'The lot is cast into the lap, but *its every decision is from the LORD.*' (Prov. 16:33).

There is another important point. On the day of Pentecost '*all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit*' (Acts 2:4). 'All of them' must have included Matthias, so if there had been an apostolic mistake here, *the Holy Spirit supported it*. There is no need to say more. The number of people addressed by Peter is given as '*about* one hundred and twenty'. We should note the word '*about*' and not deal with the figure as though it was exactly 120, nor base any important doctrine on this.

CHAPTER TWO

Pentecost

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

We come now to Pentecost. It is important to remember that Pentecost in type was not new, for it took its place in the Feasts of Jehovah given in Leviticus 23. These feasts are rich in prophetic truth pointing to the fundamental basis and the millennial teaching of the Messianic kingdom which dominates the Old Testament. They consist of Sabbath, Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and Tabernacles.

The feast of Pentecost was designated in this way because it was kept on the fiftieth (*pentekostos*) day after the presentation of the first sheaf of the barley harvest. This would be the fiftieth day from the first day of the week after Passover (Lev. 23:15). It was also known as the 'Feast of Weeks' among Hebrew-speaking people (Exod. 34:22).

At this Pentecost two great things happened, the Holy Spirit came Himself, the practical evidence of this being the endowment that He gave to the believers gathered at Jerusalem, the 'power from on high' promised in Luke 24:49. As far as the Holy Spirit is concerned, the Lord Jesus had promised the Twelve that they would receive 'another Comforter' (A.V.), the Spirit of Truth, Who would

dwelt with them and be in them as indweller for ever (John 14:16,17 A.V.).

The result of this great miracle was that all began to speak in languages. They possibly came out into the street and then the people outside could evidently hear this and they were amazed because each one heard others speaking in his language. So much so that they said, 'how is it that each of us hears them in his own native tongue?' (verse 8).

The countries from which they came are now given and there were exactly twelve! They are summed up in a threefold way in verse 11. We must not miss the fact that verse 5 describes them as 'God-fearing *Jews* from every nation under heaven'. The majority were doubtless of the Jewish Dispersion, descendants of those who had been scattered abroad in the past by the judgment of God for their sin and declension, and their number ran into millions.

There had been three great dispersions of the Jews in this way and these are indicated in the countries given in Acts 2:9-11. The faithful among them did their best to be present at the feasts of Jehovah in Jerusalem.

The experience here of speaking with tongues needs great care in consideration. It is wrong to imagine that this is only found in the Scriptures. *Glossolalia*, as it is called by its Greek name, can be psychologically induced and therefore is no proof whatsoever of the Holy Spirit's work.

A Christian psychiatrist writes :

'The product of our analysis is the demonstration of the very natural mechanisms which produce glossalia. As a psychological phenomenon, *glossalia* is easy to produce and readily understandable'. (*Speaking in Tongues and about Tongues* by E. Mansell Pattison).

The Encyclopaedia Britannica has this to say :

'The gift of tongues and their interpretation was not peculiar to the Christian church, but was a repetition in it of a phase common in ancient religions. The very

phrase *glossais lalein*, 'to speak with tongues', was not invented by the New Testament writers, but borrowed from ordinary speech. Virgil (*Acn.* vi 46, 98) draws a life-like picture of the ancient prophetess 'speaking with tongues' ... the same morbid and abnormal trance utterances occur in Christian revivals of every age, e.g. among the mendicant friars of the 13th century, among the Jansenists, the early Quakers, the converts of Wesley and Whitefield, the persecuted protestants of the Levennes, the Irvingites and the revivalists of Wales and America. Oracular possession of the kind above described is also common among savages and people of lower culture' (pp. 288, 9, 1963 edition).

No wonder false doctrines can arise from speaking in tongues and Satan can use this in order to deceive.*

Professor F. F. Bruce writes :

'The mere fact of *glossolalia* or any other ecstatic utterance is no evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit. In apostolic times, it was necessary to provide criteria for deciding whether such utterances were of God or not, just as it had been necessary in Old Testament times. "Believe not every spirit", says John, "but prove the spirits whether they be of God" (1 John 4:11), and the test he indicates is the testimony which the spirit (or the ecstatic utterance) bears to Christ. Paul had already laid down a similar test in 1 Corinthians 12:3. We should do well to pay heed to these apostolic injunctions today, in relation not only to ecstatic utterances but to other utterances as well' (*The Book of the Acts* by F.F.Bruce).

We may well ask what the purpose was in connection with the gift of languages (tongues). Professor Bruce states what we believe to be the main reason when he wrote,

*For fuller treatment, the reader is referred to *Tongues Speaking Today, a mark of spirituality or deception?* by the author, and obtainable from *The Berean Publishing Trust*.

'... the range of the languages in which these (the mighty works of God) were proclaimed suggests that Luke thought the coming of the Spirit more particularly as a preparation for the *world-wide proclamation of the Gospel*. The church of Christ still speaks in many tongues, and if her speech is not now of the supernatural order that marked the day of Pentecost, the message is the same — the mighty works of God' (*The Book of the Acts*). Those preparing for the mission field today have to learn in the normal way the language of the land to which they are going. The miracle of the Pentecostal languages certainly gives one reason why the Gospel spread so quickly over the known world. There was no need for any special language training.

⁵Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. ⁷Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? ⁸Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹(both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs — we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" ¹²Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

¹³Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine." (Acts 2:5-13).

As one might expect, there was a division of opinion among the hearers. Some wanted to know the meaning of what was happening (verse 12); others mocked and said it was the result of being filled with new (or sweet) wine.

They tried to ascribe the mighty acts of God to mere natural causes. There were mockers later on at Athens (Acts 17:32) and Peter tells us that there will be mockers in the last days of the age, belittling what God is doing

(2 Pet. 3:3,4), so this difference in attitude is characteristic of fallen human nature.

The whole situation was now ready for Peter's inspired address explaining the divine meaning of the day of Pentecost and our minds need preparing too by the Holy Spirit, otherwise we shall miss its true import.

¹⁴Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel :

¹⁷" 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. ¹⁸Even on My servants, both men and women, I will pour out My Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. ¹⁹I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. ²⁰The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. ²¹And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

²²"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through Him, as you yourselves know. ²³This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put Him to death by nailing Him to the cross. ²⁴But God raised Him from the dead, freeing Him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Him. ²⁵David said about Him :

" 'I saw the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. ²⁶Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, ²⁷because You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will You let your Holy One see decay.

28You have made known to me the paths of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence.'

29"Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. **30**But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. **31**Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. **32**God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. **33**Exalted to the right hand of God, He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. **34**For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,

"'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand
35until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."'"

36"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.'" (Acts 2:14-36).

What a difference we see in Peter now! The weak vacillating man who had three times denied his Lord was gone, and in his place stood a man filled and strengthened by God the Holy Spirit. Peter first of all dismisses the charge of drunkenness, seeing that it was only three o'clock in the day, Jewish time, but nine o'clock by Roman reckoning, far too early to have any opportunity to drink to excess. Then come words of great importance, '*this is what was spoken by (or through) the prophet Joel*'.

This means that we should study the setting of these words of Joel's prophecy. But before we do this, we should carefully look at the position of Pentecost in relation to the feasts of Jehovah recorded in Leviticus 23. Israel's religious year was spread over 7 months, the rest of the year being blank as regards these feasts. They are intensely prophetic and set forth in type and shadow the whole course of Israel's history from the day they became a nation until the great future day of ingathering at the end of

the age, when God's earthly kingdom will be set up by the advent of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The fact that God has used seven months only in which to show this typical unfolding is evidence that the number seven is intimately associated with His age-long purpose. The fact that creation occupied six days followed by a sabbath of rest, shows that at the very beginning God had this 'rest' in view (Heb. 4:9).

It is helpful to see the close association of the number seven with Israel's typical history :

Seven days — 'The seventh day is the sabbath of rest' (Lev. 23:3 A.V.).

Seven weeks — 'Seven sabbaths shall be complete' (Lev. 23:15 A.V.).

Seven months — 'In the seventh month' (Lev. 23:24 A.V.).

Seven years — 'The seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest' (Lev. 25:4 A.V.).

Seven times seven years — 'It shall be a jubilee unto you' (Lev. 25:8-13 A.V.).

Seventy times seven years — 'Seventy weeks are determined' (Dan. 9:24 A.V.).

We should realise that Pentecost cannot be understood if it is taken out of its place in this series of typical periods. We give the order of them again, Passover and Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Pentecost (Harvest), Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Tabernacles. In His foreknowledge God knew that Israel would not repent or be gathered at the Lord's first coming. His purpose of the ages would reach out to the time of the trumpets of the Apocalypse and the real harvest at the end of the age.

At Pentecost in the Old Testament a new feature was added consisting of two loaves of fine flour with leaven, a type of sin and failure. These were regarded as a 'firstfruits

unto the LORD' (Lev. 23:17 A.V.). It had already been commanded that no offering to the LORD should contain leaven or honey typifying sin and natural sweetness (Lev. 2:11). These two leavened loaves at Pentecost cannot therefore typify Christ. They must typify His people as a firstfruits.

It is evident that the reason for two loaves is that God knew the kingdom of Israel would be later divided, but at the restoration of the ten tribes and the two tribes (commonly referred to as Israel and Judah) would come together again as one before Him. Ezekiel 37:15-28 sets this forth under the figure of two sticks, one stick representing Israel and the other stick representing Judah, but they become one, God explaining that they will become one nation again and be no more two (Ezek. 37:22). The appointment of Mathias to complete the number of the Twelve, and the gathering of Jews from twelve of the nations round about fits in harmoniously when seen in the light of God's forgiveness and His plan to gather Israel again and restore the kingdom. Tradition adds other things which do not harmonize and only confuse the issue. These we must avoid.

If we keep within the scriptural atmosphere of the original Pentecost we are likely to grasp its meaning.

Coming now to Peter's explanation of the happenings at that Pentecost, we notice that he addresses his remarks to his people, namely Israel. He does not refer to or include Gentiles. 'You men of *Judaea* and all that dwell at Jerusalem', 'you men of *Israel*', 'let all the *house of Israel* know assuredly', 'the promise is *to you* and to *your children* ...' (Acts 2:14,22,36,39 A.V.). It was to the 'whole house of Israel' that Peter addressed his words and when we further consider Acts 10:28 and the attitude of the apostles and brethren in Judea (Acts 11:18) together with the exclusiveness of Acts 11:19, we can surely see that no Gentiles could be at this feast of Jehovah unless they were proselytes. Moreover Acts 21:26-36 clearly shows what

was likely to have happened had Gentiles been present at the feast of Pentecost.

Having rebutted the jibe of drunkenness, Peter now goes to the Old Testament Scripture to explain the real reason for the happenings around him. He says, 'This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel'. C.H. Welch writes, 'there can hardly be found in human language more explicit words than Peter's' (*From Pentecost to Prison*, p.52). The whole of Joel's prophecy relates to the nation (Israel) and the nations, and it looks to the great and terrible 'day of the Lord' which several of the Old Testament writers graphically describe. For instance, Isaiah 13:9-13 :

⁹See, the day of the LORD is coming — a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger — to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. ¹⁰The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. ¹¹I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless. ¹²I will make man scarcer than pure gold, more rare than the gold of Ophir. ¹³Therefore I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the LORD Almighty, in the day of His burning anger.'

One thing is certain; this is not the day of blessing, but of the wrath of God against what may be called Babylonism, the working of Satan and all his seed, as it comes out into the open at the end time. We are in the atmosphere of the book of Revelation with its wrath of the Lamb (Rev. 6:12-17).

It is in this way of tremendous judgment that this so called Christian age ends, the climax being the return of Christ with the angels of heaven, in power and great glory as He Himself taught (Rev. 19).

The part of Joel's prophecy that Peter quotes is divided into two parts as will be seen by the following :

*Joel 2:28-31***A** I will pour out My Spirit

- | | | |
|--------------------|---|--|
| (1) Upon all flesh | } | The last days.
Seven-fold beginning
at Pentecost.
The powers of the coming
age (Heb. 6:5). |
| (2) Sons | | |
| (3) Daughters | | |
| (4) Old men | | |
| (5) Young men | | |
| (6) Servants | | |
| (7) Handmaids | | |

B Present Interval — Israel not repentant and in unbelief.

B Future Day — Israel repent and look upon Him whom they pierced. The Second Advent of Christ. All Israel saved (Rom. 11:25-29).

A I will show wonders :

- | | | |
|----------------------|---|---|
| (1) Heavens | } | Seven-fold conclusion,
wonders, divine miracles,
as spoken of in the
Apocalypse and
Isaiah 13:9,10. |
| (2) Earth | | |
| (3) Blood | | |
| (4) Fire | | |
| (5) Pillars of smoke | | |
| (6) Sun | | |
| (7) Moon | | |

The first half of the prophecy began on the day of Pentecost. 'This is that' (Acts 2:16 A.V.) can have no other meaning to Peter's hearers. But he was not inferring that all these points were fulfilled in that one day. It would take an undefined period for their fulfilment. The giving of the Holy Spirit and 'power from on high' (Luke 24:49) would manifest itself in seven classes of people. Peter first of all states 'all flesh' (Acts 2:17 A.V.), and then concentrates on the chosen people of Israel, for he uses the possessive pronoun 'your' four times (in the Greek).

When we have considered Peter's further address to the nation in chapter three, we shall note there that he speaks of the restoration 'which God hath spoken by the mouth of all

His holy prophets since the world began' (3:19-21 A.V.). This can only mean the kingdom of Messiah and His reign over the earth as revealed in the Old Testament. Peter states that this was related to the prophetic setting forth of 'all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days' (3:24 A.V.). Again the happenings on the day of Pentecost are linked with these Old Testament kingdom prophecies, even so far as to mention the earthly kingdom, the first divine mention of it being made in God's promise to Abraham, 'and in thy seed shall *all the kindreds of the earth be blessed*' (Acts 3:25 A.V.). We need not have any difficulty with Peter's statement that the pouring out of the Spirit was upon all people 'in the last days'.

Here again we must realise that the first coming of Christ and the events of the Acts period are called 'the last days', for with the King present the kingdom was near, as the witness of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:2) and that of the Lord (Matt. 4:17) clearly implied, and as we shall see, that nearness is still found in the Acts. While the possibility of the kingdom being realised remained, the days then present were the 'last days' of the age and so should cause no problem.

We should note that the power from on high, came upon women (daughters), as well as men (Acts 2:17). Anna is called a prophetess (Luke 2:36), the daughters of Philip prophesy (Acts 21:9) and there must have been many others, but it was not necessary for Luke's purpose that he should quote them.

Professor Bruce, in his commentary on the Acts, states :

'... Luke probably sees in these words ('upon all flesh') an adumbration of the world-wide Gentile mission, ... certainly the outpouring of the Spirit on a hundred and twenty Jews could not in itself fulfil the prediction of such outpouring "upon all flesh" but it was the beginning of the fulfilment'.

One thing is quite certain, and that is that the second part of the quoted prophecy of Joel, dealing with miraculous signs in the heavens, did not take place at that time. It would have done had Israel obeyed the commands of John the Baptist, the Lord, and Peter, namely, to repent and turn to God. These words of Joel surely cannot be construed to mean blessing. It is judgment and punishment such as is described in Isaiah 13:8-13 and also in the book of Revelation, which reveals the wrath of God against sin and the whole Satanic purpose. Zephaniah 1:14,15 and Amos 5:20 should also be consulted. The signs in the sun and the moon are connected to the period just prior to His Second Coming by the Lord Jesus Himself (Matt. 24:29,30). We should take care not to spiritualize these judgments. These things are warnings to the whole earth that something tremendous and awe-inspiring is about to happen.

The fact that they did not happen was not due to slackness on the part of God to fulfil His Word, but, as we shall see, the conditions He laid down were not fulfilled, so that this part of the prophecy is in abeyance waiting for the divine purpose for this age to be completed concerning His heavenly people who constitute the 'New Man' of Ephesians 2:14-16.

As we have seen, at this time the kingdom of the Old Testament was near. But what is near can be withdrawn and be held in abeyance if the conditions for its fulfilment are not met. Hence the sections marked B on our structure, page 24, were not fulfilled.

Peter goes on to stress the fact that Israel's Messiah had been accredited by God by special 'miracles, wonders and signs'. Hence the miracles performed by the Lord Jesus were not just exhibitions of divine power, but God's guarantee that Christ was Israel's true Messiah and King. These same words are applied to the miracles performed by Peter and Paul in the Acts (Heb. 2:3,4) and they accredited their Gospel and kingdom ministry. Note how the Lord's

miracles, on His instructions, were made known to John the Baptist in prison to renew his faith (Matt. 11:2-6).

Peter still maintains his theme of the kingdom when he says in verse 33 :

‘Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost (Spirit), *He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear*’ (Acts 2:33 A.V.).

Peter is still explaining Pentecost and in doing this he refers to David and God’s promises to him which could only be fulfilled in resurrection :

‘Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, *He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne*’ (Acts 2:30 A.V.).

Pentecost, when it deals with the resurrection of Christ, does not reveal Him as Head of the church which is His Body, but focuses attention upon *His right to the throne of David*. Only in this way, Peter declares, could God fulfil His promise to David that one of his seed should be King. This means that the risen Christ will be King over that kingdom that the Old Testament prophets described so fully. At His birth Mary was promised that her *Son should be given the throne of His father David and that He should reign over Israel (Jacob)* (Luke 1:32-33). The apostle Paul, in his speech at Antioch, proclaims that ‘God according to His promise *raised unto Israel a Saviour*’ (Acts 13:23 A.V.), and he links the resurrection with ‘*the sure mercies of David*’ (verse 34 A.V.). These are His covenant promises concerning the Throne as promised in Psalm 89:20-37 and elsewhere in the Old Testament.

This covenant God says *He will never alter or break* (Psa. 89:34-37). The Lord is now at the right hand of God ‘from henceforth waiting’ (expecting, A.V., Heb. 10:13) till the time of *restoration* (Acts 3:21) when He would return and claim that kingship. There was no indication here

whether that waiting time would be long or short. We shall see that Acts reveals that this time could be short, if Israel would heed the further offer of God's mercy that was going to be shown to them. If they would truly repent and turn to God, there was no need for long waiting on the part of Christ. Peter's address in chapter two makes this quite clear. As he was speaking to Israel he could sum up by saying :

'Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ' (verse 36 A.V.).

He was Lord and the true King and was their Messiah (Christ). This was the One they had murdered and in doing so, we might have thought they had committed the unpardonable sin, having cut themselves off from their Saviour, but He had prayed 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do' (Luke 23:34 A.V.) and that prayer was going to be answered and the rebellious nation was going to be given another opportunity of believing and receiving their King-Priest.

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

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

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

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³Everyone was filled with awe, and many

wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶Every day they continued to meet together in the Temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.' (Acts 2:37-47).

The first effect of this speech by Peter explaining the meaning of Pentecost, a feast of God which the nation had kept for centuries, was to show that the Holy Spirit had come with all His convicting power to which the Lord had referred in John 16:7-11.

Peter's hearers could only cry out 'what shall we do?'. The apostle pointed in the same direction as John the Baptist and Christ had so fully proclaimed, and exhorted them to repent, that is to completely change their thinking, and be baptised. Israel had always been the nation of type and shadow. This was God's way of illustrating spiritual truths by earthly and material things. What they had yet to learn was the great lesson of the epistle to the Hebrews: these material things were only shadows, not the reality. Their priests 'serve at a sanctuary that is a *copy and shadow of what is in heaven*'. 'The law is only a *shadow* of the good things that are coming — *not the realities themselves*' (Heb. 8:5; 10:1). These were spiritual '... *it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*' (Heb. 10:4). There was no intrinsic value in the animal to be sacrificed. All it did was to say 'without the shedding of blood (death) there is no forgiveness' (Heb. 9:22). This was a hard lesson for a Jew to learn and it is the same for those who cling to and emphasize ritual. All this does is only to touch the five human senses, *unless the spiritual value which they represent is understood by the Spirit's enlightenment*.

It is evident that the vital truths of the epistle to the Hebrews were not yet well known. So God had not taken

away the 'picture book' of the material illustrations (types and shadows) which Israel had had for so long. Thus water baptism, which represented spiritual cleansing, was joined to repentance, but it did not teach baptismal regeneration, for if it did, the New Testament would contradict itself. The precious blood of Christ alone is the basis for the deliverance from sin and gives salvation.

The 3,000 who repented, wisely clung to the apostles' doctrine (the teaching which Peter had just given) and the fellowship with one another and prayer. This fellowship was a very practical one, for verse 44 tells us that they had 'everything in common' that is they shared everything, their meals, their money which they had by selling their possessions (verse 45). The 'breaking of bread' was not celebrating communion, for this breaking of bread was a Jewish idiom for a meal. The hard Jewish loaves had to be broken before being eaten. Thus we find the Lord Jesus, when sharing a meal with the disciples, 'broke bread' (Luke 22:19; 24:35). It was the same thing when Paul, before the shipwreck, exhorted those on board to take a meal for their health :

³⁵After he (Paul) said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. *Then he broke it and began to eat.* ³⁶They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves.' (Acts 27:35,36).

So here in chapter two, 'the converts broke bread in their homes and *ate together* with glad and sincere hearts' (verse 46). Some today, not understanding this, teach that they kept on taking the Lord's Supper and this is part of the apostles' doctrine which must be kept now. But we read here in the Acts that believers not only ate together, but sold their possessions and shared the money together (verses 44,45). We cannot help noticing that those who claim to be copying the apostles' doctrine today seldom if ever do this. Why? This was just as much 'apostles' doctrine' as sharing a meal.

‘To explain the breaking of bread as Holy communion is to pervert the plain meaning of words, and to mar the picture of family life which the text places before us as the ideal of the early believers’ (Page).

The daily breaking of bread at home surely refers to the regular meals at home and common meals ‘from house to house’.

That the witness for the truth progressed, is shown by the Lord adding day by day those who were being saved. The words ‘to the church’ are not supported by the chief texts. The word ‘save’ is used in three senses, beginning, process, conclusion. Here the repetition clearly points to the present tense.

CHAPTER THREE

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

⁶Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." ⁷Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. ⁸He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the Temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. ⁹When all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰they recognised him as the same man who used to sit begging at the Temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.' (Acts 3:1-10).

Pentecost, in its scriptural setting, anticipates the Millennium. Its gifts are called 'the powers (miracles, *dunameis*) of the coming age' (Heb. 6:5), and the summary judgment of Ananias and Sapphira for telling a lie is typical of the Day of The Lord. As the Psalmist says in Psalm 101:7,8 (A.V.):

'He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within My house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in My sight. I will early (morning by morning or every day) destroy all the wicked of the land; that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the LORD'.

There will be direct judgment for sin each day in the Millennium so that God's kingdom standards can be maintained. In this age of grace such judgment is

suspended. If this were not so, the undertakers would have a real problem. The death judgment of Ananias and Sapphira is not the only judgment in the Acts. Later on is recorded the judgment of blindness that fell upon Elymas.

Acts 2:43 tells us that '*many ... miraculous signs were done by the apostles*', so Luke is recording only a few of them. They were God's practical testimony to the truth of the great earthly kingdom happenings that were being experienced at this time. Joel's words had declared that there would be '*signs on the earth*', so all this was in harmony with the prophecy.

There were not only miracles of judgment for sin, but miracles of blessing also, so Luke now narrates one of these, namely the healing of the lame man on the steps that led up to the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. It was the ninth hour, our three o'clock in the afternoon. Peter assured him that he had no money to give, but, taking him by the right hand, he helped the man up, who, finding that his feet and ankles were strong, rejoiced exceedingly, praising God and expressing his joy not only in this way, but by jumping about in sheer joy and keeping on walking (the verb is in the imperfect tense). Little did he realise he was fulfilling the Scripture that was given of the future Messiah in Isaiah 35:4-6 '*Your God ... will come to save you. Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy*'.

Peter's act was more than a miracle, it was a *sign*, one of the many miraculous signs that God had given to the work and witness of His beloved Son in confirmation of His Messiahship, and now His faithful followers were continuing the same witness and receiving the same confirmation from God.

¹¹While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. ¹²When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Men of Israel, why does this

surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? ¹³The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus. You handed Him over to be killed, and you disowned Him before Pilate, though he had decided to let Him go. ¹⁴You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. ¹⁵You killed the Author of life, but God raised Him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through Him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see.

¹⁷"Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. ¹⁸But this is how God fulfilled what He had foretold through all the prophets, saying that His Christ would suffer. ¹⁹Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, ²⁰and that He may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you — even Jesus. ²¹He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as He promised long ago through His holy prophets. ²²For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything He tells you. ²³Anyone who does not listen to Him will be completely cut off from among his people.'

²⁴"Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. ²⁵And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' ²⁶When God raised up His servant, He sent Him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.'" (Acts 3:11-26).

The whole of this act was typical of what God was prepared to do for Israel, if only they would turn back to the Lord and truly repent, thus completely changing their unbelieving attitude of mind. Peter did not allow such an opportunity to slip, to stress this. His address contains truth

of exceptional importance. He said to the crowd of Jews gathered round, do not think that there is anything specially wonderful about us. What God has done by healing this lame man through our agency, He can do for Israel. He has first glorified His Servant Jesus by undoing your work of crucifying Him and being willing to accept a murderer in His place. Christ as the Servant reminds one of Isaiah 42:1 and 52:13 concerning the Messiah. Now He is raised from death; this had been seen by Isaiah when he wrote 'Behold, my servant ... shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high' (Isa. 52:13 R.V.).

Peter did not spare his Jewish listeners. He laid upon them the responsibility for the crucifixion of their Messiah and King. But the apostle and those associated with him were witnesses of the Lord's resurrection. He was gloriously alive and it was through the mighty power of His Name that this lame man had been healed when he put his trust in the Christ that Peter had spoken of and received His risen power, which had healed his weakened body. This showed that the miracles of healing in the Acts had the same marvellous quality as those recorded in the Gospels.

One might have thought that the climax sin of murdering their King, their Messiah and Saviour, would finally result in their permanent casting away by God. There are interpreters of Scripture who actually believe this to be true and teach that it really happened at this point, and that God was not concerned with Israel any more, but only with the church.

If this is so, it contradicts all that Peter is teaching in this highly important speech. He asserted that their repentance and turning back to God would result in *their sins being blotted out by God* and this must have included the killing of their Saviour — wonder of wonders that such a terrible sin could be forgiven!

Their turning back to God was always the divine condition in their past history of failing, to receive forgiveness and restoration by God :

‘When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, *even in the latter days, if thou turn to the LORD thy God*, and shalt be obedient unto His voice ... He will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee ... ’ (Deut. 4:30-31 A.V.).

‘Remember, I beseech Thee, the word that Thou commandest Thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: *but if ye turn unto Me*, and keep My commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set My Name there’ (Neh. 1:8,9 A.V.).

‘ ... I will judge you, O house of Israel ... repent, *and turn yourselves from all your transgressions*; so iniquity shall not be your ruin’ (Ezek. 18:30 A.V.).

‘Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you’ (Jer. 3:14 A.V.).

‘Thus saith the LORD of hosts; *turn ye unto Me* ... and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts’ (Zech. 1:3 A.V.).

From these verses it is quite clear that Peter was not saying any new thing to the Jews when he commanded them to repent and ‘right about’ turn to God.

What would be the result of their repentance and turning back to God? We need now to give Peter’s following words very close and careful attention for few seem to have grasped what he said, while others ignore it.

“¹⁹Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, ²⁰AND THAT HE MAY SEND THE CHRIST, WHO HAS BEEN APPOINTED FOR YOU — EVEN JESUS. ²¹He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to RESTORE EVERYTHING, AS HE PROMISED LONG AGO THROUGH HIS HOLY PROPHETS.” (Acts 3:19-21).

Peter makes it quite clear what would happen if Israel was obedient to these two commands and later on what would happen if they disobeyed God.

If they were obedient, certain tremendous things would take place. The times of refreshing would come from the Lord and this refreshing could be nothing less than the kingdom of Messiah which all the prophets from Samuel onwards had foretold and described (verse 24). The united testimony of God's rule on earth is the burden of the Old Testament as a whole. At the time Peter spoke, Christ had ascended to heaven, but He was not to be there for always. It was only until the times of *restoration* of the kingdom should come to pass, which also *the holy prophets of the Old Testament had promised on God's behalf*. This kingdom had been planned by God to cover *all the earth* so that all should get to know Him. It would be when the *knowledge of God will cover the earth* 'as the waters cover the sea' (Isa. 11:9, but note the whole chapter). Israel were the people chosen by God to make this known to the ends of the earth (Acts 13:45-47) and their land was given to them unconditionally through God's gift to Abraham (Gen. 15:1-18). Its city, God's city, Jerusalem was the centre from which the light of God's truth would spread. The ever widening circles had already been given, 'Jerusalem, ... Judaea, ... Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth' (Acts 1:8 A.V.).

The most important part of Peter's statement was that if they repented and turned God-wards, *the Lord Jesus Christ would be sent back to them*. He had been 'appointed for them' in the kingdom purpose of God (verse 20) as their King and Saviour and had already come to them in that capacity, but they had rejected Him. God was willing to wipe this out, and give them yet another opportunity, so that the great kingdom of the Old Testament, made known through all the prophets, could then be restored and set up. The promise and the mercy and the longsuffering of God were tremendous, for He always means what He says. But here it was conditional. Restoration does not mean

bringing in anything new, but the bringing back of something old.

No one, not even the apostles, knew what would happen to the earthly kingdom purpose if Israel failed to respond, for the simple reason that the Scriptures up to this point had not revealed what would be the result of this. Naturally, all who were believers hoped and prayed that Israel at last would be obedient and then the kingdom, which had been *so near* with the coming of the King, and proclaimed so by both John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus Himself (Matt. 3:1,2; 4:17), could then be realised by Christ's return.

But we must remember that what draws near in the purpose of God can withdraw, if the divine conditions are not fulfilled. And this is precisely what happened, for the longsuffering of God lasted some 35 years through the period covered by the Acts. It is not until we reach the last chapter of the book that we are told that Israel had blinded their own eyes, deafened their ears, and hardened their hearts so much that a practical realisation of the kingdom was impossible at that time. It was based on the great foundation of God's New Covenant with Israel which has at its centre a tender and obedient heart put there by God Himself (Jer. 31:33, but read the whole section, verses 31-37).

The earthly kingdom from this point was in abeyance, waiting for the time that at last will come when Israel shall see the returning Messiah and will finally be convicted of their terrible sin of rejection. Then, as God says, 'they shall look upon Me Whom they have pierced' (Zech. 12:10 A.V.), and it will be national mourning that will follow. As Revelation 1:7 says, 'Look, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, *even those who pierced Him*; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of Him'. Israel finally will have their real Day of Atonement and will truly repent and turn to God. The blindness that came upon Israel at Acts 28 will not last for ever, for Paul writes, in Romans 11:25-27, that this blindness lasts only

until 'the fulness of the Gentiles be come in' (verse 25 A.V.). When the fulness of God's purpose for the Gentiles is fulfilled in this present age, then '*all Israel will be saved*', for at His deferred Second Coming 'there shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is My Covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins' (verses 26,27 A.V.), a clear reference to the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31 which we have considered. In spite of Israel's sin and failing, they are still the elect nation of God and beloved by Him for the fathers' sakes, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, with whom God had made unconditional covenants (see verses 28,29). These verses are clinched by the strong statement that 'the gifts and calling of God are *without repentance*' (verse 29 A.V.), or as it is translated by the New International Version 'God's gifts and His call are *irrevocable*' — they are not subject to change on God's part.

When these facts are appreciated, we shall understand why the Second Advent of Christ was stressed as being near in all the early epistles written during the Acts period. Note the following. In 1 Corinthians we have in 1:7 'so that ye come behind in no gift; *waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*'. In 7:29 '... *the time is short*: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none'. Why? 1 Corinthians 16:22 supplies the answer, 'Maranatha', meaning 'the Lord cometh' (margin), yet after the Acts period the apostle urges widows to marry (1 Tim. 5:14). To the Roman believers Paul wrote in Romans 16:20 'the God of peace shall bruise Satan *under your feet shortly*' (A.V.) or 'will soon crush Satan *under your feet*' (N.I.V.).

'The night is far spent, *the day is at hand*' (A.V.); or as the N.I.V., '*the night is nearly over the day is almost here*' (Rom. 13:12). 'For yet *a little while*, and He that shall come *will come, and will not tarry*' (Heb. 10:37 A.V.). To these references we must add the testimony of Peter, James, John, and Jude. 'The end of all things *is at hand*'

(1 Pet. 4:7 A.V.); 'The coming of the Lord *draweth nigh*' (is near). 'The judge *standeth before the door*' (James 5:7-9 A.V.). 'The Lord *cometh* with ten thousands of His saints' (Jude 14 A.V.). 'Now these things ... were written down for our instruction, upon whom *the end of the ages has come*' (1 Cor. 10:11 R.S.V.). 'It is the last time (the last hour): ... *even now* are there many anti-christs; *whereby we know that it is the last time (hour)*' (1 John 2:18 A.V.).

This united testimony to the end of the age and the near Second Coming of Christ is overwhelming and gives abundant testimony to the reality of the promise in Acts 3:19-26 to send back Christ if Israel repented. And the reason why He did not return then was not that believers were indifferent and not ready, or that they had made a mistake in expecting Christ's early return, but that *Israel did not obey God's command to repent and turn to Him and so have been laid aside temporarily in unbelief*. He has assured us that He will not alter His promise to David, his seed, and his throne (Psa. 89:34-36). 'God hath not cast away His people which He foreknew' (Rom. 11:2 A.V.), and so when Christ does return 'All Israel will be saved' (Rom. 11:26). God's eternal promises in Jeremiah 31:31-37, with its challenge to creation, give the nation eternal security, in spite of their unbelief and failure.

What God has been doing between Israel's laying aside in unbelief at Acts 28 and His taking them back again at the future return of Christ, is to reveal part of His plan which up to the end of the Acts He had kept secret (a 'mystery') in Himself, and therefore absolutely unknowable by humanity, and this concerns God's purpose for the heavens and a calling 'far above all'. This is revealed in the prison ministry of Paul after the Acts (Ephesians and Colossians). *

*The author has dealt with this more fully in his *Unfolding Purpose of God*, obtainable from *The Berean Publishing Trust*.

The astounding thing is that so few Bible scholars have grasped the clear teaching of Peter in Acts three concerning the possible return of Christ at that time depending on Israel's repentance and turning to God. Israel's failure to do this meant the abeyance, for a period, of that Coming and the setting up of the Old Testament mediatorial kingdom on earth. And so the Lord's prayer is still true, 'Thy kingdom come. Thy will *be done in earth as it is in heaven*' (Matt. 6:9-13 A.V.). When Peter gave the very important speech in Acts three which we are considering, the Lord's Second Coming was undoubtedly near.

It will not do to say that His future advent is near because of God's reckoning of time which is different from ours. The Bible is not so written, but rather as we human beings reckon time, and near means near and far means far, otherwise words are useless for the purposes of revelation as far as we are concerned.

The fact that the Second Advent was near in the Acts period, and yet not realised, has always been a major problem to serious Bible students and some have been driven to the conclusion that Christ and the early believers made mistakes about the time of the Second Coming. There is no problem when the truth of Acts 3:19-26 is grasped and given its proper place in the outworking of the kingdom of God.

Peter ends his speech by telling the Jews who were listening that they were the 'heirs of the prophets', and that means all that the prophets stood for. Not only this, they were heirs of the unconditional covenant that God gave to Abraham when He told him, 'through your offspring *all peoples on the earth will be blessed*' (verse 25). This is nothing less than *God's earthly kingdom in germ*. It was the kingdom with all its peace and rich blessings that the Old Testament prophets had so clearly made known.

CHAPTER FOUR

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

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

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

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

¹²Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:1-12).

Luke commences this chapter by giving us the result of the important speech Peter had just made. This, together with the healing of the lame man, had caused a crowd to assemble and the Temple authorities evidently thought that they had better intervene. The 'captain of the Temple' was the chief of the Temple police, and he was responsible for

keeping order in the Temple courts. He was ranked next to the high priest and was in charge of a picked body of Levites. With them was a number of Sadducees. They rejected the truth of resurrection and we can understand why they were so annoyed with Peter and his group for his stressing in public this important doctrine. Not only this, but Peter's speech had the effect of adding a large number to the 3,000 believers who had responded on the day of Pentecost. The number of the men alone now totalled around 5,000 (verse 4).

The leaders of the nation could not disregard this, so the next day there was a gathering of the Sanhedrin consisting of rulers, elders and scribes, at which were Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John and Alexander. They confronted Peter and John, demanding to know on what authority they had been acting in such a way.

Peter, now endued by the Holy Spirit, spoke without fear, although he was addressing the supreme court of the Jewish nation. Straight away he charged them with responsibility for the death of the Lord Jesus (verse 10). God had raised Him from the dead, and this was His answer to their act of crucifixion. It was the resurrection power of the Lord that had completely healed the lame man who stood before them. They, the experts, the 'architects', had rejected the Messiah for their building (Psa. 118:22) as Christ Himself had pointed out (Matt. 21:42), but this rejected Stone God had made the chief stone of His building (Isa. 28:16). And Peter does not hesitate to say that God's salvation can be found only in Christ. It is amazing to see Peter speaking thus to the Sanhedrin and proclaiming the necessity of salvation in the name of Jesus Christ and in no other. But the Lord Jesus had already told them, 'make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict' (Luke 21:14,15).

Actually Peter had turned the table on the Sanhedrin and arraigned them before the bar of God.

¹³When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realised that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. ¹⁴But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. ¹⁵So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. ¹⁶"What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name."

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

²¹After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. ²²For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.' (Acts 4:13-22).

What amazed the Sanhedrin was the fact that Peter and John spoke with such forthrightness and yet they had no training in the rabbinical schools. Then they remembered that these men were close followers of Christ. They had 'been with Jesus', they were His companions, and learned from Him. People had said the same thing of Christ, 'how knoweth this man letters, having never learned?' (John 7:15 A.V.).

The leaders in the Sanhedrin realised that they could do little against them as the lame man stood before them healed, proving the truth of what Peter had said. They sent Peter and John outside and conferred among themselves. It

was useless to deny what had happened with the healed man there, especially as the healing had made them popular with the people, and therefore it would be unwise to punish them. In their weakness they decided to dismiss them, at the same time threatening them that there would be serious trouble if they kept on speaking of Christ and teaching in His Name.

Peter's answer to this was to say that if they were faced with obeying God or obeying men, then there was no doubt which they would choose. They would most certainly put God first and they said, 'we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard' (verses 19,20). The Sanhedrin decided to do no more than threaten them afresh and then let them go free.

²³On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. ²⁴When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. ²⁵You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David :

"'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ²⁶The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against His Anointed One.'

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

³¹After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.' (Acts 4:23-31).

Peter and John, when released, returned to the other apostles and reported to them all that had happened. Together they wisely united in prayer, addressing God as Sovereign Lord, the great Creator, the Controller of all things in whose hands they safely rested in faith. They quoted the first words of Psalm 2, recognizing that what they had just experienced was in harmony with this Psalm. Rome was typical of the raging nations, and the Jewish leaders were typical of the peoples who plotted against the Lord. Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee and Peraea, was a picture of earth's kings, and Pontius Pilate another of their antagonistic rulers.

The whole Psalm showed that all these were united against the Lord Jesus, but in spite of this, unbeknown to them, they were fulfilling the over-ruling of God (verses 27,28) concerning the suffering Messiah.

Peter and John knew that the opposition was not over, and that they still needed the strengthening of God so that they could continue to meet this boldly. They asked for more miraculous sign gifts to confirm their ministry and the book of Acts shows how wonderfully God answered their prayers. All kinds of spectacular miracles followed right throughout this period. They were public and seen by many people, and were a constant witness to the chosen nation of Israel that God was serious in His promise to restore again the kingdom that had been so graphically set forth by the Old Testament prophets; hence their need to obey God's command to them to repent and turn again to Him (Acts 3:19-26).

While the believers prayed, God began to answer their prayer by shaking the place they were in, possibly by an earthquake, and filling them all with the power of the Holy Spirit, so that they continued their bold witness (verse 31). This was a fresh filling by the Holy Spirit. It was not called a fresh baptism.

³² All the believers were one in heart and mind. No-one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but

they shared everything they had. ³³With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. ³⁴There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

³⁶Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), ³⁷sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.' (Acts 4:32-37).

The next section of Luke's book describes the unity of all the believers at this time. They continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord. This was intimately associated with the restoration of the kingdom that forms such an important part of Peter's speech to the Israelites recorded in 3:12-26 (and see 2:29-32). It is stressed again by Peter in his reply to the Sanhedrin, recorded in Acts 5:29,32 :

'Peter and the other apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than men! The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead — whom you had killed by hanging Him on a tree. God exalted Him to His own right hand as Prince and Saviour *that He might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel*. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, Whom God has given to those who obey Him."

We have heard and read many expositions relating to the resurrection of Christ, but we have never come across any one who clearly states that one of the reasons for the resurrection of the Lord Jesus was to *give repentance and forgiveness to Israel*. When we remember the divine command to Israel to repent (given again through Peter's lips in 3:19,20), we can surely appreciate the importance of this repentance in the earthly kingdom purpose of God, for this would make possible His early return and the restoration of God's kingdom on earth, all things which had

been spoken by the Old Testament prophets. We quote C.H.Welch here:

'No Jew would need to be told, that just as the feast of Pentecost with its emphasis upon the word "fifty" was a recurring annual reminder of the day of Jubilee, so the final prophetic fulfilment of all that Pentecost stood for, would be the real great Jubilee toward which all prophecy pointed. Believing therefore the "apostles' doctrine", these believers put their faith unto practice. If the jubilee was near, all would receive their own inheritance, all forfeitures would be cancelled, all buying and selling of land and possessions would come to nought; consequently, although no one could sell or buy his inheritance, he could sell whatever else he had purchased, and use the proceeds for the common good, while awaiting the Lord from heaven' (*From Pentecost to Prison* p.58).

Barnabas, who was a Levite, is specially mentioned by Luke as an example of this; 'having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet' (Acts 4:37 A.V.). Jeremiah bought land to demonstrate his faith in the Lord's promised restoration (Jer. 32:15), and Barnabas sold land to demonstrate the same conviction. The law that governed the sale of land is found in Leviticus 25.

The voluntary act of Barnabas in selling his acquired land and placing the proceeds at the apostles' feet is in direct contrast to the action of Ananias which followed. He, too, sold a possession; he, too, laid the proceeds at the apostles' feet but with the difference that he kept back part of the price while pretending he had given all. Peter made it quite clear that there was no compulsion about the selling of land when he said, 'Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?' (Acts 5:4 A.V.). Ananias sinned in that he lied to God the Holy Spirit. The sin of Ananias was the sin of Achan in Joshua 7:1.

CHAPTER FIVE

¹Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. ²With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁰At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.' (Acts 5:1-11).

To some this will be reckoned as too severe for just telling a lie, but we must remember that the summary judgment of the Lord was in operation during the Acts, for the miracles were, as Hebrews 6:5 declares, 'the powers

(miracles) of the age to come', that is the millenium, and in that age there will not only be miracles of blessing, but miracles of judgment as well :

'He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within My house: *He that speaketh falsehood shall not be established before Mine eyes. Morning by morning will I destroy all the wicked of the land; to cut off all the workers of iniquity from the city of the LORD*' (Psa. 101:7,8 R.V.).

These were the words of David, but they relate to his greater Son the true David, and His coming rule over all the earth in His kingdom. His will be a righteous rule and a rule of peace. This was quite beyond anything the son of Jesse could accomplish, although he kept his own household as pure as possible. Sin will not be allowed to increase and spread when the Lord rules, for *every day* there will be judgment for sin and evildoers will be cut off. Sin will be nipped in the bud. The Lord will have to 'rule with a rod of iron' to see that righteousness is established and maintained. Pentecost and what followed anticipated the millennium. We have seen in the Acts these two kinds of judgment, a miracle of blessing, the healing of the lame man, a picture of what the Lord wanted to do with sick and sinning Israel: and, in the case of Ananias, a warning to the chosen nation that punishment was bound to follow if they persisted in their unbelief and opposition. We shall see this again later on.

If God judged for sin today among His people who tell lies, we tremble to think what would happen. As someone has said, the undertakers would not be able to cope with the funerals. During this age, a dispensation of grace is in operation (Eph. 3:2), grace reigns (Rom. 5:20,21). Meanwhile judgment is temporally held back, but this of course does not alter the working of 'sowing and reaping' (Gal. 6:7,8).

This solemn act of God produced 'great fear' on those who heard what had happened (5:5), but this was not all, for three hours later the wife of Ananias came in, not

knowing what had happened. Upon Peter's questioning, she committed the same lie as her husband and received the same punishment. She fell down at Peter's feet and died (verses 9,10).

¹²The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. ¹³No-one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. ¹⁴Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. ¹⁵As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. ¹⁶Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed.' (Acts 5:12-16).

Luke records the many miracles which the apostles performed. They were not just showmanship, but were called 'signs' for they *signified something, they had a meaning. They were signs of the earthly kingdom.* Just as the Saviour was continually healing people from deformity and disease as Isaiah 35:4-6 had foreshown, the apostles were granted the same power, for they were making known the same kingdom that the Old Testament had described. God had promised Israel that one of His blessings would be good health. He would love them, bless them, and multiply them in the land He had sworn to their fathers to give them. 'Thou shalt be blessed above all people ... *and the LORD will take away from thee all sickness ...*' (Deut. 7:14,15 A.V.). No wonder they could enjoy a *long life* in this promised land. God knew that if His blessings are to be enjoyed to the full, good health must accompany them. We can then understand why healing takes such a prominent part in the kingdom ministry of the Lord Jesus and that of the apostles which followed after His resurrection. Looking forward to that kingdom to come with all its joy, Isaiah predicts :

¹⁹"I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in My people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more.

20"Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed." (Isa. 65:19,20).

So not only is good health to be generally experienced, but what we should expect from this, namely longer life too. These healing miracles take an important place in the Messianic kingdom when these facts are remembered; they are not just miracles at random. When they are kept in their Scriptural setting they confirm the great plan that God was working out. To pull them out of this setting, as some do, only causes misunderstanding and confusion.

No wonder then, many more people who saw these healing signs believed and joined the number of the saved. Even the shadow of Peter was effective in healing, just as later on a handkerchief from Paul did the same thing (Acts 19:11,12).

Crowds now gathered from around Jerusalem bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits and *all of them were healed*. There were no exceptions (verse 16).

17Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. 18They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. 19But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. 20"Go, stand in the Temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this new life."

21At daybreak they entered the Temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.

When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin — the full assembly of the elders of Israel — and sent to the jail for the apostles. **22But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, 23" We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no-one**

inside." ²⁴On hearing this report, the captain of the Temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of this.

²⁵Then someone came and said, "Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the Temple courts teaching the people." ²⁶At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.

²⁷Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ²⁸"We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."

²⁹Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men! ³⁰The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead — whom you had killed by hanging Him on a tree. ³¹God exalted Him to His own right hand as Prince and Saviour that He might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. ³²We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him." (Acts 5:17-32).

The effect of all this on the party of the Sadducees was to turn them into a jealous rage. They had started the persecution of Peter and John; now they extended it to the apostles as a whole and had them locked up in prison, obviously intending to take more drastic steps than they had taken with Peter and John. But they reckoned without God. During the night an angel of the Lord unlocked the doors of the jail and brought them out. The Greek word translated 'angel' just means a messenger, and this could have been a human being, but this is very unlikely. What is certain is that God opened the prison doors by His own power, whoever He used to do this.

A meeting of the Sadducees was convened the next day and the officers they had sent reported to them that the doors were securely locked with the guards standing outside each one. When the doors were opened, they found

the prisoners had vanished. As a matter of fact, at that very moment, the so-called prisoners were standing in the Temple courts teaching the people! The Sanhedrin were amazed and greatly puzzled; the more so when someone arrived and told them of this fact.

No doubt they wondered whether the apostles had sympathizers in the ranks of the Temple police, otherwise how did they escape? This was not the only occasion during the Acts that prison doors were miraculously opened, for Peter was to have the same experience in chapter 12:6-10. All this confirms what we have seen concerning these special miracles which were signs of the coming kingdom. Today many people suffer for their faithful Christian testimony and get thrown into prison and even tortured and killed; but no divine power comes to deliver them as recorded in Acts 5 and 12. This does not become a problem when we keep the experiences recorded in the Acts in their Scriptural, earthly kingdom setting.

The apostles, when released, were told by the angel to go to the Temple courts and proclaim the full message of 'this life', and this doubtless means not the present life, but that wonderful life for ever that Christ had promised to each believer who put their faith in Him.

The Sanhedrin then sent a band of police to bring the apostles to the court. They were afraid to use force because they realised that the people would probably stone them if they did so. Here the apostles were reminded of the previous warning they had received. This they had ignored and were filling the whole of Jerusalem with their teaching.

Peter evidently answered for the whole group, repeating what he had said previously, namely that they must obey God rather than men (verse 29), and once again he charged the leaders with murdering Christ. God's answer was to raise His Son, their Messiah, from the dead, and He had been raised so that Israel might repent and turn back to God, which they had been commanded to do after the healing of the lame man. If this was done, Christ would

return and the kingdom made known in the Old Testament prophets would become a reality.

In verse 31 Peter declared that the God of their fathers had raised Christ from the dead and He had been 'exalted ... as Prince and Saviour *that (in order that) He might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel*'. In the many sermons that are preached on the resurrection of Christ, how many point out that one important reason for it was to give repentance and forgiveness to rejecting Israel? This is scarcely ever mentioned, but it is a vital point in the outworking of God's kingdom in the Acts, and which figured so clearly in Christ's earthly ministry, would then be restored and set up.

We have considered (pp 47,48) the great importance of this and the reader is referred back to the exposition which so often has been missed. If this teaching is ignored one of the chief keys which unlocks the meaning of the Acts is passed over, and the interpretation then cannot be correct.

³³When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. ³⁴But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honoured by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. ³⁵Then he addressed them: "Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. ³⁶Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. ³⁷After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. ³⁸Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. ³⁹But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God."

⁴⁰His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

⁴¹The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. ⁴²Day after day, in the Temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.' (Acts 5:33-42).

Peter's address made the Sadducees furious and they wanted to put to death the apostles who were giving them all this trouble (verse 33). However, there was a prominent Pharisee whom they could not ignore. He was Gamaliel, the leading teacher of his day. He was the grandson and a disciple of Hillel, and was now the leader of the school of Hillel. He had many well known disciples, among them Saul of Tarsus (22:3). He now took part in the discussion and ordered that the apostles should be put outside the meeting place so that he could speak fully and plainly to his fellow-councillors (verse 34).

Gamaliel then advised them not to act in any rash way. He reminded them that an insurgent named Theudas and a number of followers had made trouble, but he only succeeded in getting himself killed and his followers dispersed. After him there was a revolt led by a Judas of Galilee. This revolt was crushed by Rome, but the movement continued in the party of the Zealots. Gamaliel insisted that God was still in control and if they were not careful they might be fighting against God. Therefore they should leave the apostles alone (verses 38,39).

There was a good deal of common sense in what he said and this prevailed. Finally, they decided to flog them (forty stripes save one was the usual penalty) and then let them go, warning them yet again not to speak in the name of Jesus (verse 40).

This did not dismay the apostles. They counted it an honour to suffer for the Lord and continued teaching and making known the fact that the Lord Jesus was the true Messiah (verse 53).

CHAPTER SIX

¹In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. ²So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word".

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

⁷So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.' (Acts 6:1-7).

The opening verses of this chapter deal with one of the first problems the early Christians had to face. There were two origins for the Jewish believers. Some lived in Palestine and others were of the Dispersion. The former were Hebraic Jews and the latter, Grecian Jews or Hellenists. The A.V. calls these 'Grecians'. These are not Gentiles but Jews from outside of Palestine. They had contacts with the Gentile world without having gone over to Gentile habits. They spoke Greek. A problem had arisen between these two companies.

As the N.I.V. explains, the Grecian Jews complained that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. The apostles decided to deal with this at once. They felt that the Lord had called and equipped

them for the ministry of the Word and this should be given first place as far as they were concerned. This meant that others must be appointed to deal with such matters. So they told the disciples to choose seven men to undertake this work. They must be absolutely honourable and dependable, men whom everyone could trust. Also they must be under the control of the Holy Spirit. It is suggestive that character comes before spiritual gifts here. No amount of 'spirituality' would justify the appointment of one who had not 'a good report of them which are without' (1 Tim. 3:7 A.V.).

Seven men were chosen and all have Greek names. Some of them doubtless were from the Hellenistic group and this would help for they would take proper care of the widows of Hellenists. Luke concentrates on Stephen and Philip; the others we know little about. They were all presented to the apostles, who appointed them to this work and later on to other service as well.

They prayed and laid their hands on the chosen ones. The 'laying on of hands' is referred to a number of times in the New Testament. It was used in the Old Testament in more than one way, at the bestowal of a blessing (Gen. 48:13), and also to express identification, as when a sacrificer laid his hand on the sacrificial victim (Lev. 1:4; 3:2; 16:21). It also occurred in the appointment of a successor (Num. 27:22,23). In the present case the laying on of hands identified the seven with the twelve as their deputies. In no way did it impart the gift of the Holy Spirit, for the seven were already 'full of the Spirit' (verse 3).

In verse seven, Luke inserts a short report of the progress that was being made. He does this on five other occasions (9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:31). C.H. Turner points out that this makes six divisions of the book, covering on an average five years each. In spite of all the opposition of the enemy, God's truth was spreading and His purpose being fulfilled.

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

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

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

¹⁵All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.' (Acts 6:8-15).

Stephen's ministry was accompanied by the same miraculous kingdom signs as the apostles performed. This was the way God attested and confirmed this kingdom ministry (note Hebrews 2:3,4), which goes on right through the Acts. But Satan does not allow this to occur without opposition. The spiritual conflict between God and Satan never ceases. Stephen gave his witness to the truth of God in one of the many synagogues in Jerusalem. The synagogue was started for the Jews' spiritual welfare in the later years of the Old Testament and was devoted to reading and exposition of the Old Testament Scriptures. It also served as a community centre for the Jew wherever he was. There would be several synagogues in a large town. The one mentioned by Luke was probably attended by freedmen and their relatives from the four areas mentioned, Cyrene, Alexandria, Silicia and Asia.

In this synagogue a number of Jews opposed Stephen and argued with him. Those from Cilicia are important, for among them was a young man, Saul of Tarsus, a native of Cilicia, who doubtless took part in these disputes. In spite of all their zeal, the opposers could not stand up against Stephen's wisdom or the power of the Holy Spirit manifested through him (verse 10). They persuaded some to give false evidence against him and we are reminded how the Lord Jesus suffered false charges before Caiaphas that He would destroy the Temple and build it again in three days. The enemies of Stephen must have been staggered as he no doubt took them to the prophecies of a suffering Messiah. He would draw attention to the prophetic utterance of the Lord that, in spite of the veneration in which the Temple was held, not one stone would be left upon another. He would point out that the Father seeks spiritual worshippers who would not be limited to the Temple at Jerusalem, or the mountain in Samaria. All this and more would incense the priests and zealots of the law as they were listening to Stephen's powerful arguments, which were a threat to their livelihood, if the Temple ceased to exist.

Stephen was therefore arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin. His opposers, and those who gave false evidence, stressed that he was against the Temple and the law of Moses and there could be hardly a worse charge than this, for the Temple was the centre of Judaism. Any charge against the Temple also affected their livelihood as well as their religious ideas. But as the enemies watched him, they saw one whose face glowed like an angel's. It was like the face of Moses when he came down from Sinai, reflecting the glory of the Lord which had surrounded him on the top of the mountain.

One person at least was never able to forget this and that was Saul of Tarsus. From this moment, he had no rest in his mind until he had experienced what Stephen had come to know, the glory and wonder of the true Saviour and Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER SEVEN

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

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

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

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

¹¹"Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our fathers could not find food. ¹²When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers on their first visit. ¹³On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh

learned about Joseph's family. ¹⁴After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. ¹⁵Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our fathers died. ¹⁶Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.

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

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

²³"When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites. ²⁴He saw one of them being ill-treated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defence and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. ²⁵Moses thought that his own people would realise that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. ²⁶The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, 'Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?'

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

³⁰"After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. ³¹When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to look more closely, he heard the Lord's voice: ³²'I am the God of your fathers, the God of

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.

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

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

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

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

"'Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings for forty years in the desert, O house of Israel? ⁴³You have lifted up the shrine of Molech and the star of your god Rephan, the idols you made to worship. Therefore I will send you into exile' beyond Babylon.

⁴⁴"Our forefathers had the Tabernacle of the Testimony with them in the desert. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. ⁴⁵Having received the Tabernacle, our fathers under

Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, ⁴⁶who enjoyed God's favour and asked that he might provide a dwelling-place for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷But it was Solomon who built the house for Him.

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

⁴⁹" 'Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. What kind of house will you build for Me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? ⁵⁰Has not My hand made all these things?' " (Acts 7:1-50).

Two charges were levelled at Stephen. (1) speaking against the holy Temple, (2) changing the customs Moses had delivered. In Stephen's defence of the gospel of grace (for that was what it was) we see a foreview of the great fundamental truths which were contained later on in the epistle to the Hebrews, namely that the Judaistic rituals were only shadows setting forth the spiritual truth which was fulfilled in the work and witness of the Lord Jesus Christ. And when this fulfilment was realised, there was no more need for the shadows! But the Jew imagined that his ritual was eternal and would never be altered. When a Jew was saved by grace he had the difficulty of unlearning all this, but it was absolutely necessary if he was ever to learn afresh the riches of grace contained in the gospel of Christ.

In his careful and powerful exposition of the Scriptures relating to these two charges against him, Stephen explains his position by the historical method, and gives a rapid survey of God's dealing with the people of Israel and the Gentiles. It is the same method used by Paul in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:1 and onwards). In this speech Stephen shows that the appearances and worship of God were not confined to Jerusalem or the Jewish Temple. His dealings with Abraham and others before Israel's time proves this.

Stephen goes back to the beginning of Israel's history and starts with the 'God of glory' appearing to Abraham. The word 'glory' is a very difficult one to interpret in the Scriptures, chiefly because it relates to something outside human experience and is really confined to God. Moses longed to see the glory of God (Exod. 33:18), but God explained to him that he was asking the impossible, for a full sight of that glory would have consumed him. Nevertheless God said He would make His glory pass before him, at the same time shielding him with His hand, and when He had passed by, He would withdraw His hand and Moses would see His 'back parts' (verse 23 A.V.), or perhaps better, Moses would see 'His after-glow'. When the Lord Jesus took upon Himself a human body, He left the glory that was His, and when He was about to return to the Father, He asked the Father to restore that glory (John 17:4,5). Perhaps the best way of understanding the title 'the Lord of glory' which Stephen uses, is to take it as referring to the Shekinah, the visible and overwhelming radiance of God that was manifest later in the Tabernacle and Temple. This was expressed by the 'pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night'. Stephen was a Jew and would naturally associate God's glory with the Tabernacle and Temple in this way; Moses saw it in the fiery bush that burned continually.

After the call of Abraham, there were two great types of Christ — Joseph and Moses, and one important point is that both Joseph and Moses were rejected, but accepted by Israel *the second time*. Not one word of Stephen's speech could be shown to be wrong, and its application to the Jewish leaders was devastating and stirred up all their bitterness and hatred. Stephen was really proclaiming the same message as the Lord Jesus gave and he read the Old Testament in the light of the life and death of Christ. We advise the reader to peruse carefully the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, so that he can see just what Stephen is expounding. He deals with Moses carefully and it is helpful to realise that the life of Moses is

divided into three periods of 40 years each: in Egypt 40 years; in Midian 40 years; and he governed Israel 40 years, and was 120 when he died (Deut. 34:7). Clearly Stephen means to draw a parallel between Moses and Christ.

He shows that God the Most High is not confined in any building, however splendid it may be. Solomon himself saw this and acknowledged it in his prayer :

‘But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house that I have builded?’ (1 Kings 8:27 A.V.; cf 2 Chron. 6:18 A.V.).

God is spirit and can be worshipped anywhere by any individual who has learned that there is but one way of drawing near to God, that is through Christ, the Way, for He Himself said, ‘No-one comes to the Father except through Me’ (John 14:6). Now universality and spirituality are free from the shackles of Jewish racial and national limitations and Stephen is looking forward to such a time.

Stephen shows clearly that he understood all this. In addition he points out that the attitude of Israel in rejecting and crucifying Christ was exactly the same as they had displayed in their treatment of the prophets sent by God. They persecuted and killed them. Their whole history was marked by rejection of God’s word. Even when rescued and delivered from the cruel bondage of Egypt, in their journey to the promised land they longed to go back there again and would have done if this had been possible. He chides them for their continual idolatry, from the worship of the golden calf right up to David and Solomon’s day. The references to Moloch and the god Rephan deal with the worship of the planets, like the heathen nations. Moloch and Rephan were linked with Saturn.

Stephen also deals with the origin of the Temple. While God allowed Solomon to build Him a house, yet the purpose of this house was not to confine it to Israel. Its main function was for it to be a house of prayer *for all*

nations. Isaiah 56:7 A.V. declares, 'Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for *all people*'. The Lord Jesus refers to this and confirms it in Mark 11:17, 'And as He taught them, He said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for *all nations*?''" It is noteworthy, too, that in Solomon's dedicatory prayer there is no mention of sacrifices.

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

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

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

⁵⁹While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.' (Acts 7:51-60).

Stephen, the accused, now becomes the accuser. The words he used to the Jewish leaders cut like a knife. For them, of all people, to be called 'uncircumcised in heart' was absolutely galling. 'You always resist the Holy Spirit' he said (verse 51). They gloried in possessing the law of God, yet openly violated it (Rom. 2:23), and were nothing more than murderers (verse 52).

They were cut to the heart, Luke tells us. In 5:33 the same word and form (*diaprio*, imperfect passive) is used of the effect of Peter's speech on the Sadducees. The leaders were absolutely furious. They began to 'gnash their teeth at him', like a pack of hungry snarling wolves. Stephen must have known that this meant death for him. He gazed to heaven and saw God's glory and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God (verses 54-56). Elsewhere He is seen seated at the Father's right hand. Various reasons for this have been given by expositors, but it is better to avoid these when no explanation is given in the Scriptures. Here is the last occurrence of the title 'Son of Man' in the New Testament.

In their hatred the members of the Sanhedrin rushed at him and mob violence followed such as we sometimes see today. No vote was taken by the Sanhedrin. They had not the right to put anyone to death without Rome's permission. In their madness they ignored both these things. If they thought about it at all they evidently reckoned that Pilate would connive at such an incident that did not concern Rome. They dragged Stephen out of the city and began to stone him to death. Stephen prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit', and then like his Saviour, he prayed for his enemies, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them'. Luke's record adds beautifully, 'when he had said this, he fell asleep' (verse 60). At last, for the brave servant of the Lord there was peace. He used the same lovely figure as his Saviour did when Lazarus died. Christ said, 'Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep' (John 11:11 A.V.). Why cannot all believers use this beautiful word for death? Death for the believer in Christ is nothing more than going to sleep and this is the constant figure used for it in the holy Scriptures. Resurrection is the Lord waking His children up when the eternal day comes with all its wonder and joy. Our word cemetery is derived from a Greek word and means the 'sleeping place' of the dead. Stephen was the first martyr of the New Testament and he was well named

for 'Stephen' comes from the Greek word meaning 'crown'. Did not the Saviour say later on to John in His message to the church at Smyrna, '*be thou faithful unto death* and I will give thee *a crown* of life?' (Rev. 2:10 A.V.).

What an honour for the King of kings to crown the overcomers. Surely Stephen will be there amongst them.

CHAPTER EIGHT

'And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.

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

⁴Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. ⁵Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. ⁶When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. ⁷With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. ⁸So there was great joy in that city.' (Acts 8:1-8).

While Stephen was being murdered, a young man stood there, holding the clothes of his slayers, watching the terrible scene and giving his approval to it. It was Saul of Tarsus, who apparently never forgot the brave and faithful witness of Stephen (22:20). Little did he realise that later on he, too, would be executed for his faithful service for the Christ whom Stephen worshipped and for whom he gave his life.

The first section of the Acts closes with the martyrdom of Stephen. Immediately vicious persecution broke out against the apostles and the believers associated with them, chiefly the Hellenists of which Stephen was one. This may explain why the apostles were spared for a while. It could be that the persecutors also remembered the advice of Gamaliel in Acts 5:34-40.

But the persecution was overruled by God. Christ had said that His followers were to be witnesses for Him 'in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the

uttermost part of the earth' (Acts 1:8 A.V.), and now the faithful ones were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1), so even the wrath of man can be made to serve the Lord's purposes.

With the ministry of Philip that follows in Samaria prejudice was broken down, for it is written, 'Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans' (John 4:9 A.V.). This indicates a further movement from the exclusive Jewish centre at Jerusalem and begins to prepare the way for the ministry, later on, of the chosen vessel to the Gentiles, Paul.

At this time he was the prime mover in the persecution that was taking place. He felt that the new witness was a danger to the religion of Judaism which meant so much to him, so he resolved to stamp it out. He 'began to destroy the church' (verse 3) and the word Luke employs was used of the ravages of wild beasts on their prey. Saul of Tarsus was never a man to do things by halves. He dragged off men and woman who were believers and threw them into prison.

But the witness went on, for the scattered ones preached the Word wherever they went and so God's purpose was being fulfilled.

Philip was one of the Hellenistic leaders and also one of the seven who had been chosen to tend to the needs of the widows of Hebraic Jews (6:5). His kingdom ministry (verse 12) was confirmed by God's miraculous signs in the same way as the witness of the apostles.

⁹Now for some time a man named Simon had practised sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great,¹⁰ and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is the divine power known as the Great Power." ¹¹They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic. ¹²But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were

baptised, both men and women. ¹³Simon himself believed and was baptised. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.' (Acts 8:9-13).

The verses that follow deal with Satan's opposition through the work of Simon Magus. The devil is always opposing the work of God. Simon was a dealer in magic and had quite a hold on the people who watched with amazement the things that he did. He noticed the miracles performed by Philip and straight away wanted this power to add to his own pretensions. He even went so far as being baptised, perhaps to keep in touch with Philip. His 'belief' (verse 13) was obviously very flimsy, judging by the way he tried to buy Peter with money.

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

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

²⁰Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! ²¹You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. ²²Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. ²³For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

²⁴Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me.'" (Acts 8:14-24).

The witness was now reaching Samaria as the Lord had predicted (Acts 1:8), and was a major event for the apostles. They were evidently concerned to give supervision to the progress of the kingdom gospel here, so they sent Peter and John to do this. What a difference from the attitude in the past of John and his brother James when they asked the Lord that fire might be brought down from heaven to punish the Samaritans for their antagonistic attitude! (Luke 9:52-56). They had once been banned from entering Samaria (Matt. 10:5). Now this had been lifted in view of the Lord's purpose to spread the gospel world-wide, with a knowledge of His kingdom.

The Samaritan believers had accepted the gospel through Philip's ministry, but had not yet received the Holy Spirit and His power. This was conveyed to them by the then normal means, the laying on of the apostles' hands.

Simon Magus now tries to buy this wonderful power he has seen working through Peter and John, but Peter sharply rebukes him (verses 18-24), yet does not deny him the possibility of true repentance. It looks as though Simon was only afraid of punishment and begs Peter to pray for him. At this point Luke concludes the story and leaves him to the mercy of God.

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

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

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

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

³²The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture :

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so He did not open His mouth. ³³In His humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of His descendants? For His life was taken from the earth."

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

³⁶As they travelled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptised?" ³⁸And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptised him. ³⁹When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and travelled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.' (Acts 8:25-40).

Luke now records Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch. It started and ended with a miracle. An angel spoke to Philip and directed him southwards on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza.

This is not the type of miracle that occurs today. And when his witness to the eunuch was finished, we are told that the Holy Spirit 'caught away Philip that the eunuch saw him no more' (verse 39 A.V.). Later on in Acts 19:11,12 (A.V.) we read :

‘And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them’.

All these were miracles out of the ordinary; they were these special sign-gift miracles that accompanied the witness of the earthly kingdom ministry right throughout the Acts, such as were performed by the Lord Jesus in His earthly ministry, when He and John the Baptist declared this kingdom to be near. The Ethiopian eunuch was in a position of authority. Oriental rulers often employed such and put them into high places, and this one was an official in charge of the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. He was reading aloud from the prophecy of Isaiah. This was not unusual in these early times, for reading was usually done aloud. The Spirit directed Philip to approach him, and in doing so, Philip asked him if he understood what he was reading (verse 30). ‘How can I’, he said, ‘unless someone explains it to me?’ And of course he was in the position that thousands have been in since his day. There is a tremendous need today for those who can truthfully and faithfully explain and interpret the Word of God and make it clear to those who read it.

The portion that the eunuch was considering was Isaiah 53:7,8 (see quotation above — Acts 8:32,33), the great prophecy that sets forth the suffering Servant, and it had recently been fulfilled in the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus. He had forecast this when He said, ‘Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected?’ (Mark 9:12).

It was not easy to understand the prophecy before it was fulfilled, but after the fulfilment it was clearer. Philip, led by the Holy Spirit, started from this very Scripture and made known to the eunuch the gospel, the good news about the Lord Jesus. The man was certainly persuaded that this was true, and evidently Philip had remarked about baptism, for the eunuch asked for this in verse 36, and then suddenly

and miraculously Philip was caught away by God and the eunuch was left alone rejoicing in his tremendous new experience. Later on he possibly introduced the gospel to Ethiopia.

Luke concludes this chapter by telling us that Philip appeared at Azotus which was about 20 miles north of Gaza and from there he continued to preach the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

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CHAPTER NINE

'Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

⁷The men travelling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything' (Acts 9:1-9).

Luke now goes back to Saul of Tarsus and records his raging fury against the Christians. In Genesis, Jacob had prophesied concerning Benjamin, 'Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he devours the pray, in the evening he divides the plunder' (Gen. 49:27). In Saul of Tarsus, he had a true son who was not content with viciously persecuting believers all over Palestine, but even when they fled to other countries, he went after them there. He, the greatest son of Benjamin, was fulfilling this prophecy.

Later on the apostle himself refers to his bitter persecuting zeal in four of his epistles :

'For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it' (Gal. 1:13).

'For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God' (1 Cor. 15:9).

'... in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church ...' (Phil. 3:5,6).

'... Christ Jesus ... considered me faithful, appointing me to His service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man ...' (1 Tim. 1:12,13).

In his speeches recorded in the Acts, he confessed to deeds of savagery, which shows how bitter were the memories of those early days.

'I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison' (Acts 22:4).

'On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them' (Acts 26:10,11).

Perhaps with this record before us, we can understand why later on he was willing to suffer as he did, being beaten with stripes in the synagogues; he was stoned and many times imprisoned.

We should note the references to 'the Way' in the Acts. It was the way of salvation and the way of true Christian life (see 19:9,23; 22:4; 24:14,22; see also 16:17; 18:25). The Lord Jesus called Himself the Way (John 14:6), the only way to the Father and to eternal life.

Suddenly, as Paul journeyed, a light brighter than the sun surrounded him and he was completely overwhelmed.

Luke evidently attached great importance to the account of Paul's conversion, for there are three accounts of it in the Acts.

There are critics who love to find fault with Scripture and they point out discrepancies between them, but in all essentials the three accounts agree and testify to their truthfulness.

What a shock it must have been for Paul to hear that divine voice saying, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?' (verse 4). Even if he did not fully recognise the risen Christ at this stage, he knew it was no human being who spoke in the midst of that overwhelming glory. Professor A.T. Robertson says here, 'It is open to question if *kurie* should not be translated 'Sir', as in 16:30 and Matthew 21:30'.

We cannot say what was the precise moment Saul recognised the glorified Christ, but it must have dawned upon him very quickly for he surrendered at once, just as Thomas did (John 20:28). And it is true to say that he surrendered everything, as his life, following this, showed. He never wavered from this experience to the end of his life. What a testimony the Lord gave to His oneness with His people! Whatever touched them, touched Him. Both Paul and those travelling with him fell to the ground. The men were able to get up (verse 7), but Paul evidently was the last one to get up from the ground.

The Voice had said to him, 'get up and go into the city (Damascus) and you will be told what you must do' (verse 6). But the glory of Christ had blinded him and he had to be led into Damascus by his fellow travellers, and for three days he had no sight or food (verse 9). It is not hard to believe that this tremendous experience left his eyes permanently weakened.

¹⁰In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

¹¹The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹²In a vision he has seen a man

named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

¹³"Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. ¹⁴And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

¹⁵But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. ¹⁶I will show him how much he must suffer for My name."

¹⁷Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord — Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here — has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptised, ¹⁹and after taking some food, he regained his strength.' (Acts 9:10-19).

In Damascus there lived a man named Ananias who received a vision from God which directed him to go to Saul, and lay his hands on him, and this would be the means of restoring Saul's sight. Ananias, however, had heard of the terrible persecution that Saul had been engaged in, and he made his protest (verses 13 and 14), but the Lord said to him :

'Go! This man is My chosen (elect) instrument to carry My Name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for My Name' (verses 15,16).

What Ananias did not know was that Christ had chosen this man to play a great part in the furtherance of His kingdom, the goal of it being to touch the whole earth, the Gentile nations and their rulers and the people of Israel.

It is significant that the Lord puts the despised Gentile first and the chosen people of Israel last. Saul was yet to become an apostle to the Gentiles in a special way (Eph.

3:6-12). The time had now come for God's great kingdom to widen and embrace the Gentile, for this rule of God was to extend to the whole earth. At the same time this would be a lesson to Israel and a stimulus to them, when they saw God's purposes of grace enlarging to take in the nations whom they despised, thus making them envious and waking them up from their spiritual blindness and opposition (see Romans 11:11). This is a Scriptural meaning for the admission of the Gentile to Israel's position during the Acts which is usually overlooked. It does not, of course, fit in with popular interpretations (see also Romans 10:18,19 and 11:17-29).

The Lord's words concerning Paul's future sufferings were unique, for on saving a person, God does not usually also tell them of the amount of suffering they will have to endure for Him. It would be very disquieting to most people to say the least. But in Paul's case the cup of suffering was going to be a large one and he himself describes it in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28. If one wonders how a human body and mind can endure such a catalogue of suffering and testing, one can only look to the mighty resurrection power which Paul experienced, and Ephesians 1:18-21 describes, and which was more than sufficient for all his needs. It also explains a difficult passage in Colossians 1:24, 'now I rejoice in what was suffered for you (i.e. his sufferings for them, and see Ephesians 3:13), and I fill up *in my flesh* what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of His Body, which is the church'. We should not think that this refers to the Lord's sufferings on the cross or imagine, that they were not complete on our behalf and needed the addition of human suffering. Hence the sufferings of Christ are those He appointed for the apostle Paul and at his conversion the Lord showed him just how large was this measure. 'How much he must suffer for My Name' is the measure of a quantity and Paul does not shrink from what the Lord showed him. He was concerned to fill up that measure of

suffering and by the time he had finished the Christian pathway mapped out for him by the Lord, he had done so.

'Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. ²⁰At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. ²¹All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who caused havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" ²²Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ' (Acts 9:19-22).

After the restoration of his sight through the instrumentality of Ananias (verses 17,18), Paul spent a short time with the disciples at Damascus and then straight away he commenced his new life and faithful service to the Lord he had so vehemently opposed in the past. This was a complete turn around or conversion, through the power of the risen Christ. He preached Christ as the Son of God in the synagogues, and this meant presenting Him as the Messiah of promise and hope, and was a full acknowledgement of His deity from which he never wavered. There is certainly no power in any other preaching.

No wonder those who listened to him were amazed as they remembered his past life and compared it with what they now heard. As the days passed Saul became more and more powerful in his witness. Many of the Jews became confused and turned into being his enemy, for he proved that Jesus is the Christ (that is the Messiah, verse 22) and this enmity lasted right throughout the remainder of the apostle's life and became one of the chief things Satan used in his attempt to upset and destroy God's purposes of grace. This method of argument Paul continued to use with the Jews (Acts 17:1-3).

²³After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him, ²⁴but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. ²⁵But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.' (Acts 9:23-25).

In verse 23 Luke says 'after many days had gone by' and it was probably at this point that the apostle went into Arabia for several years (Gal. 1:15-17), but this is not enlarged upon by the writer. These verses in Galatians make it clear that Paul did not remain in Damascus, but went into Arabia and then returned there before going back to Jerusalem. We can supplement the narrative in the Acts with items from Paul's epistles, and therefore assume that at this juncture Saul returned from Arabia (between verses 22 and 23) and then resumed his preaching in the Jewish synagogues. We should not imagine that Luke records every item of truth that he knew, but keeps to his purpose of writing.

The situation had grown worse, for his Jewish enemies were plotting to kill him (verse 23). Paul now knew what Stephen felt at his hands. His own life was in peril in the Jewish quarter in Damascus. His escape is not only described in the Acts, but also by the apostle himself in 2 Corinthians 11:32 and onwards, which gives us further details.

Someone who sympathized with him had a house which had been built on to the city wall, and while the enemies were guarding the gates of the city to arrest him, he was lowered through a window in a large basket and so made his escape.

²⁶When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. ²⁷But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸ So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking

boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him. ³⁰When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

³¹Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.' (Acts 9:26-31).

Having got over one problem, Saul returned to Jerusalem, but another confronted him there, for the disciples distrusted him because of his previous life and enmity, and the Pharisees regarded him as a turn-coat. We may have some sympathy with the attitude of the disciples, for although they had probably heard of his conversion, they knew little about him and some might have regarded him as a hypocrite or a spy in a new rôle to ruin them.

The situation was saved by the influence of Barnabas, who befriended him. Barnabas was true to his name which means 'son of encouragement'. He was evidently highly regarded by the believers in Jerusalem and made it clear to them that he had heard Saul's story of his conversion and believed it. It was greatly to the credit of Barnabas that he had the insight and the courage to stand by Saul at this crucial moment of his life when he was alone and misunderstood.

Some of the distrust therefore was removed. He had been introduced to the apostles and they were told of his fearless stand for Christ at Damascus. He therefore stayed with them for a while and moved freely in Jerusalem as he continued his bold witness for the Lord.

This was mainly in the synagogues of the Hellenists who remembered vividly the faithful witness of Stephen in these very synagogues and what had happened to him largely through Saul's enmity. They therefore sought to kill Saul and their violent attitude made Saul's stay there dangerous.

At this point we are helped by what Paul tells us later on, that at this juncture the Lord Jesus appeared to him in a vision in the Temple (Acts 22:17-21) and commanded him to leave Jerusalem. Paul protested that he was willing to meet the fate of Stephen, but the Lord had other plans for him. His time for martyrdom had not come for there was much to be done in the pagan Gentile world to which the Lord now sent him (Acts 22:21). He went to Tarsus (9:30).

Luke now comments on the condition of things at that moment. With the persecutor converted, persecution ceased and the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria had peace. God continued to bless the gospel and the number of believers increased and they were strengthened and encouraged (verse 31).

Tarsus was Saul's native city. As Galatians 1:21 (A.V.) tells us, he 'came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia'. Tarsus was the chief city of Cilicia. It had a long history of around 1,000 years, and at this time was a free city under the Romans. It was a leading centre of learning, very much like a university city, and doubtless Saul had received much of his learning there. He evidently remained there for some years while the Lord was shaping him for the great ministry which was to come in the Gentile world. It was absolutely vital that the large number of Israelites who lived in foreign countries should have the same opportunity of hearing the gospel message of the kingdom that the Jews living in Palestine had received under the ministries of John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus. Not that the Gentiles were forgotten, for God had a definite place for them in His kingdom purpose as the later epistle to the Romans clearly shows, but it was to the Jew *first*, the covenant people of God (Rom. 1:16; 2:5-11).

Not until this part of the ministry and witness had been completed could it be said with truth that *all Israel had heard* the kingdom message (Rom. 10:18), but all had not believed and the reason for this is elaborated in chapter eleven. Christ had been rejected by the Israelites living in

the promised land and, as Acts records, He was also rejected by the Jews living outside the land (i.e. the Dispersion scattered over various countries). Thus the *whole nation* rejected Him in spite of the great patience and longsuffering of the Lord shown in the book we are studying, which covered about 35 years.

³²As Peter travelled about the country, he went to visit the saints in Lydda. ³³There he found a man named Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years. ³⁴"Aeneas," Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and tidy up your mat." Immediately Aeneas got up. ³⁵All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord' (Acts 9:32-35).

Luke now comes back to the witness and acts of Peter. He came to Lydda, which was the Old Testament Lod (1 Chron. 8:12) near Joppa. With the believers there was a man named Aeneas, and Luke, who was a physician, noted that he was a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years. Peter told him that Christ could heal him and instructed him to get up and make his bed. This he immediately did. In all these cases of miraculous healing in the New Testament it was more than just improvement. It was immediate and complete healing.

So here we have Peter restoring this man to complete health with the power of Christ. All who lived in the vicinity of Lydda and the plain of Sharon saw this, with the result that they turned to the Lord.

³⁶In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor. ³⁷About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. ³⁸Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"

³⁹Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around

him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

⁴⁰Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning towards the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. ⁴¹He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive. ⁴²This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. ⁴³Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.' (Acts 9:36-43).

Joppa was the port of Jerusalem (2 Chron. 2:16, the modern Jaffa). A believer lived there named Tabitha. Her name meant Gazelle, which in the Greek was Dorcas. She was well known because of her deeds of charity and help for poor people. She became ill and died. As Lydda was near Joppa where Peter was, two friends were sent to him to ask him to come.

When he arrived he was brought into an upstairs room, where he found the body washed in accordance with Jewish custom. Around her stood widows, who had evidently benefited from her kind acts, sorrowing and displaying the garments she had made. Peter asked them to leave the room and then got down on his knees and prayed. He addressed the dead woman using practically the same words that the Lord Jesus uttered when He raised Jairus' daughter from the dead (see Mark 5:41). Peter said, 'Tabitha, get up'. She opened her eyes and sat up. Then he called the believers and widows and presented her to them alive. Again the result was that many were saved and believed in the Lord, so once more Peter had been given the power that the Saviour had exercised in defeating death. As we have seen, both of these miracles were sign gifts to Israel of the nearness of the kingdom and it is therefore quite evident that the ministry of the Acts was not something entirely new, but the carrying on of the witness that the Lord Jesus had given Israel in His earthly ministry when, as their King-Priest, He had made known the

nearness of that kingdom which had been revealed by all the Old Testament prophets (Acts 3:19-26).

After this Peter remained some time at Joppa, living with a tanner named Simon (verse 43).

CHAPTER TEN

¹At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. ²He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. ³One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!"

⁴Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked.

The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. ⁵Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. ⁶He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea."

⁷When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. ⁸He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.' (Acts 10:1-8).

This chapter is of great importance in the working out of God's plan for His kingdom on earth. He had called the people of Israel and separated them to Himself, but not to restrict His kingdom purposes to them. They were to be a holy nation, a priestly kingdom, a channel through which He would reach the other nations of the earth. As Paul reminded the Jews who were opposing at Pisidian Antioch, quoting Isaiah 49:6 'I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, *that you may bring My salvation to the ends of the earth*'.

This is why the Jew is 'first' in the Acts period, not to be the first in power and material things, as nations regard power and position, but the first in spiritual things and godly example. They should have taken the gospel to the ends of the earth for two reasons: (1) the kingdom and rule

of God was impossible without it. God's kingdom could not consist of people dead spiritually, 'dead in trespasses and sins' (Eph. 2:1 A.V.); and (2) as the people of Israel by their persistent unbelief and opposition to the purposes of grace were getting further and further away from God, the coming of the Gentile into blessing with them might stir them up and wake them up spiritually (Rom. 11:11 and note the whole context). As we have remarked before, this spiritual fact is constantly passed over by expositors because they ignore the teaching of the Messianic kingdom so fully portrayed in the Old Testament.

The widening of God's kingdom purpose to include the Gentile was later to be described figuratively by Paul as a wild olive grafted in to the true olive tree — Israel (Rom. 11:17-29), and Acts 10 describes the beginning of this purpose. It deals with Cornelius, a Roman centurion, and Roman centurions always appear in a favourable light in the New Testament (Matt. 8:5; Luke 7:2; 23:47; Acts 10:1; 22:25; 27:3). He was in charge of what was called the Italian Regiment or band. A legion had ten cohorts or 'bands' and sixty centurions. Italian cohorts were sent to any part of the Roman Empire as needed. The procurator at Caesarea would need a loyal cohort he could trust, because the Jews were restless.

Luke describes Cornelius as 'one that feared God' and such people were 'God-fearers', who came into the worship of the Jewish synagogue without circumcision and so were not strictly proselytes. They had seats in the synagogue but were not Jews. Cornelius was obviously a good-living man who respected God and the Jewish people. He prayed regularly and gave generously to those in need.

Again we have angelic ministry which is peculiar to the Acts. At first, seeing the angel, Cornelius was frightened, but what the angel said quietened him when he was assured that God had heard his prayers. And now he was directed to send men to Joppa to fetch Peter, which he did straight away. Caesarea was some 28 miles from Joppa.

⁹About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹²It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. ¹³Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." (Acts 10:9-13).

Luke now returns to Peter, who went to the flat roof of the house where he was staying with a tanner by trade. This was a quiet place for prayer. While he was waiting for a meal, the Holy Spirit gave him a vision of a large sheet being let down to the earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals as well as reptiles and birds and he heard a voice which told him to 'get up, Peter. Kill and eat'.

¹⁴"Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

¹⁵The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

¹⁶This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.' (Acts 10:9-16).

Peter's reply was definite. 'Surely not, Lord!' he said, 'I have never eaten anything impure or unclean' (verse 14), and by this he meant ceremonially unclean. Peter's attitude is often put down to bigotry, but this is not true. The regulations regarding food were made by the Lord and expressed in the law given through Moses and one cannot judge Peter fairly unless these are known, and it must be said that many Christians do not know them because the Old Testament is neglected.

Let us therefore take heed to its teaching. In Leviticus 11;2,3 (A.V.) we read :

'These are the beasts which ye shall eat among all the beasts that are on the earth. Whatsoever parteth the hoof, and is clovenfooted, and cheweth the cud, among the beasts, that shall ye eat'.

There follows a long list of prohibited animals with the recurring words 'they are unclean to you' (Lev. 11:8 A.V.). 'shall be an abomination unto you' (Lev. 11:20,23 A.V.).

In addition to this :

'These are unclean to you among all that creep: whosoever doth touch them, when they be dead, shall be unclean until the even' (Lev. 11:31 A.V.).

There may have been health reasons for this, but the real reason is given by God in verses 44-47 :

'For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy ... this is the law of the beasts, and of the fowl, and of every living creature that moveth in the waters, and of every creature that creepeth upon the earth: *to make a difference* between the unclean and the clean, and between the beast that may be eaten and the beast that may not be eaten' (Lev. 11:44-47 A.V.).

This is reiterated in the corresponding section of Leviticus, namely chapter 20 :

'I have said unto you, Ye shall inherit their land, and I will give it unto you to possess it, a land that floweth with milk and honey: I am the LORD your God, which have *separated you from other people*. Ye shall therefore *put difference* between clean beasts and unclean ... which I have *separated* from you as unclean. And ye shall be holy unto Me: for I the LORD am Holy, and *have severed you from other people, that ye should be Mine*' (Lev. 20:24-26 A.V.).

In this atmosphere the Jew was born, lived, moved and had his being. These regulations were important for they were involved with the holiness of God. The separation was not due to Jewish prejudice, but was God's regulation. This does not mean that the Jews should regard Gentiles as their enemies and despise them or have no dealings with them. It did mean that they were not to emulate the mode of living of the Gentiles and in this respect *God had made*

the separation between them and every faithful Israelite knew this and obeyed the Lord's rules.

It was this, then, that formed the background of Peter's life and with this in mind we can understand Peter's attitude concerning the command to eat any type of animal that he saw in the vision of the sheet let down from heaven.

It was faithfulness to the law of God that made Peter hesitate, but he now had to learn that God's kingdom purpose was widening with world-wide blessing in view. Not only this, but the admission of the Gentiles was meant to stir Israel up to emulation and combat the spiritual declension which was growing alarmingly at this time (Rom. 10:19; 11:7-12).

¹⁷While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. ¹⁸They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.

¹⁹While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. ²⁰So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them."

²¹Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?"

²²The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say." ²³Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went along. ²⁴The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. ²⁶But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself."

²⁷Talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. ²⁸He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. ²⁹So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"

³⁰Cornelius answered: "Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me ³¹and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. ³²Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.'

³³So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.'" (Acts 10:17-33).

Peter was evidently giving careful thought to what to him must have been a strange vision, and meanwhile the men sent by Cornelius discovered where Peter was living and they were waiting at the gate.

Once again we have a direct message from the Holy Spirit, Who told Peter to go out and meet them. The men explained why they had come and pointed out that an angel had told Cornelius to send for him so that he (Cornelius) could hear what Peter had to say. While divine guidance can be true for all children of God, the method used by the Lord during the Acts period was unique. Christians do not experience angels talking to them and giving commandments today. In many respects this important period was unique as we shall see.

The next day Peter, with other believing friends from Joppa, joined those from Cornelius and made the journey to him.

Cornelius was expecting them and had called together some of his relatives and close friends. When he met Peter,

Cornelius, as the N.I.V. shows, 'fell at his feet in reverence' (verse 25).

It is practically certain that a God-fearing man like Cornelius, who had been under Jewish instruction at the synagogue, would not have worshipped a human being as God. What he did was done out of respect for Peter. Moreover the A.S.V. footnote here states that the Greek word *proskuneo*, translated 'worship' in verse 25, is used as an act of reverence either to God or man.

It seems evident that Peter was somewhat embarrassed, for it was likely that he had never received such treatment before. He told Cornelius to get up, for he was only a man. No Jew needed telling that there was only one Being who could claim worship and that was God (Exod. 34:14).

Peter then commenced to speak to him and to tell him that it was unlawful for a Jew to associate with a Gentile. This again was not just narrow-mindedness. Actually, social intercourse with a Gentile was not directly forbidden by the Mosaic law, but the rabbis had added it for the sake of safety and made it binding by custom, and social custom is a compelling force. This was done largely because of the Gentile carelessness regarding food matters for which, as we have seen, God had clearly legislated. A Jew would be likely to become unclean ceremonially by entering a Gentile building or handling articles belonging to Gentiles. Edersheim tells us that an orthodox Jew was expected to immerse after visiting a market to avoid defilement (*Jewish Social Life* pp. 15,26,137).

In actual fact, the vision Peter had received taught him to call no *food* common or unclean, but he was quick to realise that the meaning of the mixed animals referred to human beings.

It can be seen, therefore, that to accept hospitality from Gentiles and sit at table with them was virtually impossible for an orthodox Jew. But the lesson Peter had received on the house-top had so impressed him that without hesitation

he accepted the Gentile messengers of Cornelius and made the journey to meet him.

Cornelius now describes the heavenly visitor he had seen and the encouraging words he had given him. The visitor in shining clothes was obviously an angel who spoke to him in his own language, again an unique experience that we do not have today.

³⁴Then Peter began to speak: "I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism ³⁵but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right. ³⁶You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, Who is Lord of all. ³⁷You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached — ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with Him.

³⁹"We are witnesses of everything He did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed Him by hanging Him on a tree, ⁴⁰but God raised Him from the dead on the third day and caused Him to be seen. ⁴¹He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen — by us who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead. ⁴²He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that He is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name." (Acts 10:34-43).

Peter now shows that he fully grasps the teaching of the vision he had received. He now could see that God's kingdom purposes were going wider than Israel. Nor would any Gentile have to accept all that Judaism stood for in order to be acceptable to God. Had not Micah written centuries before that what God requires is 'to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God' (Micah 6:8), and while this did not save anyone it surely gave the

right mental attitude to receive the gospel and this Cornelius had. He was ready to receive the gospel that Peter was now faithfully preaching which ended with the words, 'everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His Name' (verse 43). This gospel included peace (verse 36), and there is no other way to have real peace between individuals and God, between races and nations, than by Jesus Christ (see Eph. 2:17) and He is Lord of all, both Jews and Gentiles, as Peter stated.

It has been noted that this speech corresponds in broad outline with the Gospel of Mark. There was a close link between Peter and Mark, who often heard Peter preach and evidently planned his Gospel on this model. In it there is nothing about the birth and childhood of the Lord Jesus, nor the ministry supplied by John's Gospel for the period (a year) between the baptism and the Galilean ministry. Peter gives here a statement of the life, death and resurrection of the Lord with Scriptural proof that He is the Messiah, whom the Old Testament prophets had portrayed as the Anointed One (see verse 38). Peter had been a witness of these things and knew that they were true.

⁴⁴While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. ⁴⁵The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter said, ⁴⁷"Can anyone keep these people from being baptised with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." ⁴⁸So he ordered that they be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.' (Acts 10:44-48).

Before Peter had finished his address, the Holy Spirit came upon them, as the N.I.V. states. There is no need to translate *epiipto* literally as the A.V. 'fell on them', and this was as it were a Gentile Pentecost. The Jewish believers who had come with Peter were amazed that the

gift of the Holy Spirit had been given to Gentiles. Their conception of the kingdom set forth by all the Old Testament prophets was that it was limited to the chosen nation of Israel.

They had forgotten that God had said at the beginning of His dealings with Abraham that his seed were those through whom *'all* the families of the earth would be blessed' (Gen. 12:3). As before, the gift of the Holy Spirit was accompanied by water baptism.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

'The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ²So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticised him ³and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them."

⁴Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened: ⁵"I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. ⁶I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds of the air. ⁷Then I heard a voice telling me, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.'

⁸"I replied, 'Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.'

⁹"The voice spoke from heaven a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.' ¹⁰This happened three times, and then it was pulled up to heaven again.

¹¹"Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. ¹²The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man's house. ¹³He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. ¹⁴He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.'

¹⁵"As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. ¹⁶Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁷So if God gave them the same gift as He gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?"

¹⁸When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life." (Acts 11:1-18).

The news from Caesarea spread like wildfire among the Jewish Christians throughout Judea. The fact that a leader like Peter had eaten meals with pagan Gentiles, making himself ceremonially unclean, was incomprehensible. So Peter had to give an account of himself to the Jewish believers at Jerusalem when he arrived there. They said to him, 'you went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them'. It is plain that Peter was not regarded as any kind of pope or overlord. Nor did they object to his preaching to Gentiles. What upset them was that Peter had violated his obligations as a Jew and further, some of the meat at a Gentile table could have been offered as an idol sacrifice and thus be polluted.

The situation was serious, so Peter had to start from the beginning and give the full story of God's dealings with him at Joppa and Caesarea. The complaint made by these Jewish believers was the same that the Pharisees had made against the Lord Jesus (Matt. 9:11). When Peter had finished the story, he asked a rhetorical question, 'who was I to think that I could oppose God?' (verse 17). His statement of the facts made an unanswerable defence. And yet, later on, in Antioch, Peter played the coward before Jews from Jerusalem on this very issue of eating with Gentile Christians!

On hearing Peter's defence, the Jerusalem Hebrew believers said nothing. How could they, when God had given His blessing on Gentile believers and in doing this had clearly shown His will?

¹⁹Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. ²⁰Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.

²¹The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

²²News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. ²⁴He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

²⁵Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.' (Acts 11:19-26).

'Those who were scattered abroad' (A.V.), are the same words as those of 8:4 about the ones who were scattered by Saul, and the words that follow in chapter eleven make a direct reference to it 'upon the tribulation that arose about Stephen' (R.V.). From this point Luke follows Saul through his conversion and back to Jerusalem and Tarsus. After this he shows the acts of Peter outside Jerusalem as a result of the cessation of the persecution from the conversion of Saul, with the Gentile Pentecost in Caesarea and the outcome in Jerusalem.

Now Luke starts again from Saul's persecuting work and brings in a new line of events up to Antioch, parallel to the previous event. This Antioch in Syria must be distinguished from Antioch in Asia Minor (Pisidia). Both were founded by Seleucus 1 Nicator, and were named after his father Antiochus. The Antioch in Syria was the third metropolis of the world, coming next to Rome and Alexandria. It had a large Jewish community, perhaps as many as 500,000, and the city was well known for its power, wealth and vice. It was destined to supplant Jerusalem as the centre of Christian activity.

The believers who had fled from the Jerusalem persecution restricted their evangelizing to the Jewish

community. They knew that God's programme was 'to the Jew first', even though it was widening to take in the Gentile. The sense of the passage here refers to Greek Gentiles, not Greek-speaking Jews. The new visitors evidently decided that the time had come to present the Gospel to Gentiles, and so they proclaimed to them Christ as Saviour and Lord, and this met with immediate response, for the Lord was with them and blessed their efforts.

The news of this reached Jerusalem and just as Peter and John had earlier gone to Samaria to investigate Philip's missionary activity, so, the leaders at Jerusalem sent someone to look into these novel events at Antioch. This person was Barnabas, and it was a wise move on their part for a man of wisdom was called for and Barnabas already had a position of leadership at Jerusalem. He was rightly named son of consolation or encouragement and was known for his generosity (Acts 4:36,37). He originated from Cyprus and gave continuous encouragement to the new believers to hold fast to their new beliefs, knowing that the glow of first enthusiasm and response might pass, as often happens after a revival.

And so the witness increased, and evidently Barnabas realised that it was getting too big for him to handle alone. Not only this, but he knew the right man who could help him and that man was Saul of Tarsus, though he might be difficult to find as several years had passed since Saul had left Jerusalem for Tarsus. However, he did find him and brought him to Antioch and Luke tells us that for a whole year they worked together and many were brought to a knowledge of true salvation. God always has a man prepared for any emergency in His kingdom purpose.

As the people of Antioch were constantly hearing the name *Christos* on the lips of those who followed Christ, they decided that a suitable name for them was CHRISTians (verse 26). We have put the first syllable of this new name in capitals.

Unfortunately we are universally wrong, pronouncing the name as with a short i, and as a result the word is used thousands of times without the user realising that CHRIST is in this name, and without Him the origin and meaning of the Name is completely lost. All real CHRISTians are related to CHRIST, and how absolutely vital it is to recognise this today!

²⁷During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius). ²⁹The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. ³⁰This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.' (Acts 11:27-30).

Luke now records that certain prophets came to Antioch from Jerusalem, and we should remember that prophecy was one of the evidential gifts of the Holy Spirit in the Pentecostal period.

Once again we should remember that the prophet in the Word of God was more than a foreteller of the future. Primarily he was a spokesman for God, a forth-teller. John was a prophet in this sense (Luke 7:26) and prophets were superior to the speaker with tongues (languages, 1 Cor. 14:3,4).

One of the prophets from Jerusalem named Agabus who did actually look into the future by the aid of the Holy Spirit, forecast a famine (he appears again in 21:10,11). News of an impending famine stirred up the Christians at Antioch to collect a sum of money to help relieve the resulting difficulties in Palestine. Each apparently set aside a fixed sum of money from their income or property. When the total was completed they deputed Barnabas and Saul to take it to the elders in Judea. This is the first use of the word *elder* in connection with the Pentecostal church. It will be seen that *elders* and *overseers* are used interchangeably in 20:17 and 28, and also in Titus 1:5,7

(*bishop* Titus 1:7 A.V.). We must cast from our minds the modern conception of a bishop. At this time in the New Testament they were simply overseers who were leading the various assemblies of believers.

CHAPTER TWELVE

¹It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. ²He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. ³When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. ⁴After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

⁵So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

⁶The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. ⁷Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.

⁸Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." And Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him. ⁹Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

¹¹Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent His angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating."

¹²When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where

many people had gathered and were praying. ¹³Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door. ¹⁴When she recognised Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!"

¹⁵"You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, "It must be his angel."

¹⁶But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. ¹⁷Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. "Tell James and the brothers about this," he said, and then he left for another place.

¹⁸In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. ¹⁹After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.' (Acts 12:1-19).

At the beginning of this chapter Luke records the opposition of King Herod. This was Herod Agrippa 1, a grandson of Herod the Great and Princess Mariamne. He was king of Palestine A.D. 42-44. Only for these three years since the death of Herod the Great was a Herod king over Palestine, and never afterwards. About eight years had elapsed since persecution over the death of Stephen ceased with the conversion of Saul. Herod Agrippa was an Idumean and was anxious to placate his Jewish subjects while retaining the favour of the Romans. So he built theatres and held games for the Romans and Greeks and murdered Christians to please the Jews. He first of all executed James the son of Zebedee, who was the first of the apostles to meet a martyr's death. There is a theory that Herod also executed John, James' brother. Professor F.F. Bruce comments on this, 'The theory, propounded by some, that in the original form of the present narrative, James and John were both executed by Herod, is quite without warrant ... that John the apostle suffered

martyrdom at Jewish hands either on this occasion or at some later time before the fall of Jerusalem, rests on the flimsiest foundation' (*The Book of the Acts* p. 247). No one who values truth then, is going to build on such a weak foundation. Professor Bruce further writes, 'his brother John ... after suffering in his turn for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 1:9), was to outlive all the other apostles'.

In addition to the execution of James, Herod Agrippa proceeded to arrest Peter as he saw this pleased the Jewish opponents of the faith. He did this during 'the days of unleavened bread' (verse 3, A.V.) which was the Passover, and this tells us the time of the year that it happened. There would be extra crowds of Jews from abroad, and this was a fine occasion for Agrippa to increase his favour among them by his extra zeal against the Christians. He took care against any attempt to free the prisoner. This is the third imprisonment of Peter (4:3; 5:18).

Four soldiers in each quaternion were placed, two on the inside with the prisoner and two on the outside, in shifts of six hours each. One chain was fastened to a soldier on either side of Peter. It was a crisis for the Jerusalem church. James had been slain, and Peter was to be the next victim. But earnest prayer was going up to the Lord from the believers. And James writes that 'the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much' (James 5:16 A.V.).

Little did the believers, who were praying for Peter in the dangerous position he was in, realise that God was already working. Peter was sleeping, chained to two soldiers, when he felt a nudge which woke him up. A light appeared in the cell, and someone was there who was evidently more than human. Luke tells us it was an angel who said to him, 'quick, get up', and the first part of this amazing miracle commenced, for the chains which held him fell off his wrists. The angel then told him to dress and put on his sandals and follow him out of the prison. Peter

could hardly believe what was actually happening. He thought it was all a dream. Gates opened by themselves until they reached the street and walked the length of it, when the angel left him suddenly. Peter now knew that this was no vision, but actual fact, so he made his way to one of the chief meeting-places in Jerusalem, the house of Mary, Mark's mother. What happened then was very human, to say the least. While many in the house were praying for Peter, he was actually at the door knocking, and when a young servant girl named Rhoda came to answer it, she recognised the voice which could only be Peter's. She was so excited that she ran back without opening the door and told them all it was Peter who was there. Now although they had been praying earnestly for Peter's deliverance, when it really happened they did not believe it! Have any of us any stones to throw at this unbelief? It is likely that we have experienced the same thing. Have we never prayed and then afterwards thought it was asking too much for the Lord to answer it. How we need to remember the lines of the hymn writer, 'for His grace and power is such, none can ever ask too much'. We sometimes forget that we have an almighty Saviour Who is on our side (Rom. 8:31).

Peter described to the believers how the Lord had delivered him from prison and then told them to let James and the other brethren know, James being the leader at this time. From verse 11 we can see that Peter believed that his deliverance was through the work of an angel. Luke evidently thought so too. There is no need to ascribe it to treachery among the guards, although they had to pay the penalty of death for Peter's escape (verse 19). Herod ordered that a thorough search for Peter should be made, but he was nowhere to be found, and no one knows to this day where he went.

'Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there a while. ²⁰He had been quarrelling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. Having secured the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked

for peace, because they depended on the king's country for their food supply.

²¹On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. ²²They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." ²³Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.

²⁴But the word of God continued to increase and spread.

²⁵When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.' (Acts 12:19-25).

Luke now records that Herod left Jerusalem and went down to his other capital, Caesarea. At this time the cities of Tyre and Sidon, which depended on Galilee for their food supply, somehow gravely offended Herod, so he cut off their supplies, thus compelling the cities to apologize to him, and so make peace.

What followed is related by Josephus as well as Luke. Herod Agrippa arranged a festival in honour of the Emperor Claudius. At this festival Herod put on royal apparel which included a robe of silver tissue which shone brilliantly through the rays of the sun, and the vast crowd became excited as Herod made a speech. They got more and more worked up, finally shouting, 'it is the voice of a god (or God), not of a man' (22). As with Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:30) pride went before a fall, for Luke adds 'because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died'. He accepted impious flattery instead of giving God the glory. Josephus tells us that the rotting of his flesh produced worms. Herod was carried out of the theatre a dying man. He lingered for five days and then died.

On the death of Agrippa, Judea reverted to government by procurators. Later on in the Acts three of his children

appear in the narrative, Drusilla (Acts 24:24), Agrippa the younger and Bernice (Acts 25:13).

In verse 24, there is another comment by Luke on the progress of the Christian witness :

‘But the word of God continued to increase and spread’.

These progress reports occur throughout the Acts (2:46,47; 6:7; 9:31; 11:27; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:31).

In spite of all the opposition of Satan, God’s purpose was being carried out. The mission of Barnabas and Saul (verse 25), refers to 11:29 and might have taken place after the death of Herod.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

'In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. ²While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.' (Acts 13:1-3).

Acts 13 is generally spoken of as the commencement of the apostle Paul's great ministry, but actually this new ministry started earlier, at 11:22-26 and for a time overlapped the ministry of Peter. By the second half of Acts we find Antioch to be the centre of operations, not Jerusalem. There were undoubtedly outstanding men in the church at Antioch and Luke names three of them. It is tempting to try to link them with others in the New Testament with the same name, but some of these names were common and there is no sure basis for us to rely on.

Manaen is the Greek form of the Hebrew Menahem (which means 'comforter'). He had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch as a foster-brother. This Herod was Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great who ruled Galilee and Peraea as Tetrarch from 4 B.C. to 39 A.D.. Lucius is one of the forms of Luke, but this was not Luke the physician and human author of the Acts.

While these and other prophets and teachers were carrying out their ministry, God the Holy Spirit made it clear that the time had now come for their great mission with the gospel among the Gentiles. After they had fasted and prayed, the leaders of the church laid their hands on them and wished them God-speed. This was not ordination to the ministry, but a solemn consecration to the great missionary task to which the Holy Spirit had called them.

The church at Antioch now recognised them as apostles (see Acts 14:14), chosen as such by the Lord.

Luke again stresses the over-ruling of the Holy Spirit in guiding them to go to Cyprus (verse 4). Barnabas was a native of Cyprus and so would know the conditions there well. Later on, after the rupture with Paul, he took John Mark with him back to Cyprus (Acts 15:39).

⁴The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. ⁵When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.

⁶They travelled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, ⁷who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. ⁸But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. ⁹Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, ¹⁰"You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? ¹¹Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun."

Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. ¹²When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.' (Acts 13:4-12).

Cyprus was an important island and was annexed by Rome in 57 B.C., and there were many Jews there. When they arrived at Salamis they first went to the Jewish synagogue, as was Paul's custom all through the Acts (17:1,2, and see 13:46; 18:4,19; 19:8; Rom. 1:16; 2:10).

This was not because he had an inclination that way; rather it was because this was essential to the kingdom message, just as Christ had stressed in His earthly ministry. He was sent only to Israel (Matt. 15:24), and He kept the ministry of the apostles to Israel alone (Matt. 10:5,6).

Quite obviously, it was not to restrict the kingdom to Israel, for Scripture makes clear that the earthly kingdom of God, when established, will be world-wide (Isa. 11:1-9). The answer is that Israel was chosen to be the channel through which the knowledge of this glorious kingdom will spread over the earth. That is why Paul asserted to the Jews at Antioch that *it was necessary that they had the gospel first* (Acts 13:45-47) and this makes their failure all the more tragic. But God's purpose cannot fail, and the New Testament makes plain how this kingdom will yet be realised.

It is most important that we understand this if we wish to grasp the plan of God relating to that kingdom which, as the Lord declared in His model prayer when He said that *this kingdom will come in the future*, and then God's purpose, *will be done on earth as it is in heaven* (Matt. 6:10). This was future when these words were uttered and it is still future today, awaiting His return to the earth in power and great glory to bring in lasting peace and a measure of response and right behaviour.

At Paul's conversion the Lord Jesus had warned Ananias and the apostle about the trials and suffering he would have to endure for His sake (Acts 9:15,16). The constant spiritual battle between God and Satan never ends until Satan's final destruction, and here on Paul's first missionary journey we have evidences of its working. The next thing that Luke describes is the opposition of Elymas, the sorcerer; later on there was the contradiction, blasphemy and persecution of the Jew, and then the ordeal of stoning and being left for dead. No wonder he later wrote to the Corinthian church and gave a terrible list of sufferings he endured for Christ's sake (2 Cor. 11:23-28).

Yet God sustained and preserved him and he realised in experience the truth he expressed later in Philippians 4:13.

From Salamis, Paul and Barnabas went to the other end of the island and reached Paphos. The new Paphos was reached by a fine Roman road some eight miles north of the old Paphos, which was famous for the worship of Venus.

They straight away met the opposition of a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. This title means 'son of Jesus', but he showed himself to be a son of the devil and Paul severely rebuked him (verses 9-11). Divine judgment came upon him and he was blinded for a time. The proconsul, Sergius Paulus, on the other hand, was greatly impressed and 'believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord' (verse 12). These two characters were typical of what was about to happen. Israel, getting further and further away from the Lord in unbelief and opposition were becoming blind to God's truth, yet that blindness was not to last for ever, just as Elymas experienced (Rom. 11:25-29). On the other hand a Gentile with the name of Paul believes, and he is typical of the Gentile reception of the gospel and knowledge of the kingdom (28:23-28).

We may be surprised that a man of understanding like Sergius Paulus should be a victim of Bar-Jesus, but we have only to remember the superstition that is abroad today with its horoscopes, lucky days, lucky stones in rings, visions of clairvoyants, etc.. It is significant that Sergius Paulus called for Barnabas and Saul, not they for him. Like the Gentiles in Acts 13:42 who asked Paul to preach to them, the proconsul was ready to hear the truth.

The opposition of Bar-Jesus was parallel with Peter's experience with Simon Magus in Acts 8:9-24, but in both cases the enemy behind the scene was defeated by the Lord.

Arrival at Pisidian Antioch

¹³From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. ¹⁴From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. ¹⁵After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people please speak." (Acts 13:13-15).

Having faithfully preached the gospel in Cyprus, the native island of Barnabas, they crossed to the south coast of Asia Minor and went to Perga in Pamphylia, which was a coastal district of Asia Minor. It was here, at Perga, that John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem. Luke does not give us the reason for this. It may be that he could not face the hardships that a journey in Asia Minor would have involved. There were perils of all kinds around them and ahead (2 Cor. 11:26). But it was a sad decision, and the apostle Paul looked upon it as weakness on the part of Mark. When his cousin Barnabas wanted to take him again with them, Paul said, 'no'. So much was at stake in this proclamation of the truth of God that one could not risk taking people who were not 100% for it whatever the consequences were.

In the place of Barnabas and Mark, Silas joined Paul and so the witness went on. It is good to see that, later on, Paul realised that Mark had grown spiritually and thus he was ready to receive him back into Christian service (2 Tim. 4:11). It was at this time that Saul was called Paul, the one who was to be the leader through the Acts, and later in the proclamation of the gospel and all the truth connected with the earthly kingdom, and then after the Acts period the wonderful revelation made to him by the ascended Christ concerning the great Secret (Mystery) of Ephesians and Colossians which deals with the highest heavens.

Paul and Barnabas now went on to Pisidian Antioch. This Antioch was really in Phrygia and towards Pisidia,

and this distinguished it from the other Antioch in Syria. It was a colony like Philippi and so a free city, and here they entered into the southern part of the Roman province of Galatia. On the Sabbath day they visited the synagogue and took their seats as visiting Jews. They were given the opportunity to speak as visitors, which was customary.

¹⁶Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: "Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! ¹⁷The God of the people of Israel chose our fathers; He made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt, with mighty power He led them out of that country, ¹⁸He endured their conduct for about forty years in the desert, ¹⁹He overthrew seven nations in Canaan and gave their land to His people as their inheritance. ²⁰All this took about 450 years.

"After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. ²¹Then the people asked for a king, and He gave them Saul son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled for forty years. ²²After removing Saul, He made David their king. He testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse a man after My own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.'

²³"From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Saviour Jesus, as He promised. ²⁴Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel. ²⁵As John was completing his work, he said: 'Who do you think I am? I am not that one. No, but He is coming after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.'

²⁶"Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. ²⁷The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognise Jesus, yet in condemning Him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. ²⁸Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have Him executed. ²⁹When they had carried out all that was written about Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb. ³⁰But God raised Him from the dead, ³¹and for

many days He was seen by those who had travelled with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now His witnesses to our people.

³²"We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers ³³He has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm:

"'You are My son; today I have become your Father.'

³⁴The fact that God raised Him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words:

"'I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.'

³⁵So it is stated elsewhere:

"'You will not let your Holy One see decay.'

³⁶"For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed. ³⁷But the One whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.

³⁸"Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. ³⁹Through Him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. ⁴⁰Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you:

⁴¹"'Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you.'"' (Acts 13:16-41).

What took place here was like the synagogue service described by Luke in his Gospel (4:16 and onwards), where the Lord Jesus read the second lesson and then gave His sermon based upon it.

Paul begins his address with a résumé of the history of Israel. He describes his hearers as Jews and those 'who fear God'. These were the God-fearing Gentiles who attended synagogue services. He picks out important

features of Israel's Old Testament history and then comes to the important point, 'God has brought to Israel the Saviour Jesus as He promised' (verse 23).

He then proceeds to show that the very hatred of the Jews was but the fulfilling of the Scriptures they read every Sabbath day, but his important point was the resurrection of the Lord, which was seen by many witnesses. The glorious conclusion was :

'³⁸Therefore ... I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. ³⁹Through Him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses' (Acts 13:38,39).

Here the apostle reaches the great doctrine of his early ministry, 'justification by faith without the deeds of the law', and this doctrine finds its full exposition in the epistle to the Galatians and the epistle to the Romans.

Yet this wonderful doctrine proved to be a stumbling block to the Jews with their ceremonial works, and foolishness to the Greeks with their abstract philosophical ideas (1 Cor. 1:23-25), hence the warning in the verses that follow.

In this warning Paul quotes from the Septuagint of Habakkuk 1:5. The prophet expressed amazement that God should so long permit the sins of Judah to go unpunished. The Lord's answer is that he has an instrument at hand which he is about to use, Nebuchadnezzar and his army. Paul warns his hearers that disaster followed those who ignored the prophets, and an even greater disaster will fall on those who reject the Gospel.

'⁴²As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. ⁴³When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

⁴⁴On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.

⁴⁶Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷For this is what the Lord has commanded us:

"I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."

⁴⁸When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honoured the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

⁴⁹The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. ⁵⁰But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. ⁵¹So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. ⁵²And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.' (Acts 13:42-52).

The apostle's discourse aroused deep interest from his hearers, so they asked him to speak on these things again the next Sabbath. They evidently talked about this to other people so that almost the whole city gathered to hear Paul explain the Scriptures. After his first address Paul talked with many of the Jews and proselytes and urged them to continue in the grace of God. After the second address the rabbis, who were the leaders, were filled with jealousy, for they were not able to draw the crowds as Paul and Barnabas had done. They stirred up opposition to the apostles, contradicting all Paul and Barnabas had said, and saying injurious things themselves. The apostles accepted the challenge of these Jewish opposers. What Paul says to them now is of great importance, for it stresses the reason that Israel had been the nation chosen by God. It was certainly not to show favouritism or to limit the kingdom

truth to them, but rather that they should be a channel through which it could reach the nations in their darkness and finally extend to the whole earth. This is why they constantly put the Jews first. It was *necessary* because of this divine purpose. We should keep this before us all the time if we desire to understand the great plan of God. Paul reinforces this by quoting Isaiah 49:6, and it should be noted that Israel in this chapter is addressed as the *servant of Jehovah* (verse 3). But, alas, Israel constantly turned out to be a disobedient servant and what was happening at Pisidian Antioch was typical of what was going to happen throughout Paul's great missionary journeys. There was constant opposition, not from pagan Rome, but from the people of God, the nation of Israel, wherever he went. No wonder he was so grieved by this attitude of his own people (Rom. 9:1-5), and behind it all was the blinding activity of Satan and the powers of darkness.

How different was the attitude of the aged Simeon when he held the infant Christ in his arms and quoted the language of Isaiah 49 referring to the Lord :

'For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the sight of *all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles* and for glory to Your people Israel' (Luke 2:30-32).

The glory of Israel should have been that they were privileged to pass on the knowledge of salvation and the greatness of the Lord's kingdom to the ends of the earth. Instead they murdered their Saviour and King, who alone could have made this possible, and even though yet another opportunity to do this was granted them during the period covered by the Acts, they refused once more and the end of the Acts sees them laid aside in unbelief by God, unusable by Him, and so they have been ever since.

The result of all that was happening to the apostles was that, in spite of all the enmity of the Jewish leaders, 'the Word of the Lord spread through the whole region', so once more the Lord's purpose triumphed. Nevertheless the

opposers persisted in their persecution of Paul and Barnabas and 'expelled them from their region'.

Having faithfully preached the gospel and finding it rejected by so many of the Jews, the apostles declared they would turn to the Gentiles who, for the most part, were ready to receive the glad tidings. This was not, as some have taught, the place where Israel as a nation was laid aside in unbelief. It was a turning away locally, for we read in the context of the first verse of chapter 14, 'Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue'. However, 'the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit' (verse 52).

In connection with the Gentiles, verse 48 in the A.V. declares :

'... when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed'.

This sounds like a divine decree, but some translators render the verb *tasso* (ordain A.V.) as meaning here '*well disposed to*' (so Alford, Bloomfield, Wordsworth, Rotherham and others). F.F. Bruce does not agree. Professor A.T. Robertson comments :

'The word "ordain" is not the best translation here. "Appointed", as Hackett shows is better ... this verse does not solve the vexed problem of divine sovereignty and human free agency. There is no evidence that Luke had in mind an *absolutum decretum* of personal salvation ... certainly the Spirit of God does move upon the human heart to which some respond, while others push Him away' (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*).

Where we do not have full agreement regarding the text of the New Testament it is better not to be dogmatic.

Having been rejected and persecuted by the Jewish leaders, Paul and Barnabas 'shook the dust from their feet'. This was according to the command of the Lord Jesus in Mark 6:11 (and see Luke 10:11) and evidently applied here

to the Jewish community rather than the city as a whole. They then took the eastward road to Iconium, which was situated in the eastern region of Galatic Phrygia.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The opposition which they had experienced at Antioch was repeated at Iconium (verses 1-7).

‘At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. ²But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. ³So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of His grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders. ⁴The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. ⁵There was a plot afoot among the Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to ill-treat them and stone them. ⁶But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, ⁷where they continued to preach the good news.’ (Acts 14:1-7).

Lystra had been made a colony in B.C. 6 by Augustus, and Derbe was the frontier city of the Roman empire in the south east and so Paul kept to his plan of going to the centres of influence so that the truth might spread. It was in this region that Paul first became acquainted with the household of Lois, Eunice and Timothy. The apostle had a high regard for Timothy whom he called his son in the faith, and in chapter 16 we find Timothy ready to accompany Paul on his journey. Here, therefore, must be placed the conversion of Timothy.

When he wrote from his last imprisonment recorded in 2 Timothy, Paul reminded the young man of these early days:

¹⁰You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, ¹¹persecutions, sufferings — *what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. ...*’ (2 Tim. 3:10,11).

What memories these words would produce in Timothy's mind!

⁸In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. ⁹He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed ¹⁰and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

¹¹When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" ¹²Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. ¹³The priest of Zeus, whose Temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.

¹⁴But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: ¹⁵"Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. ¹⁶In the past, He let all nations go their own way. ¹⁷Yet He has not left Himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; He provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy." ¹⁸Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.' (Acts 14:8-18).

Luke now records Paul's healing of a crippled man who had been lame from birth and had never walked. This healing reminds us of the lame man healed by Peter in Acts 3:1-11. Paul realised that the man had genuine faith and so he called out to him, 'stand up on your feet' and the man not only immediately jumped up, but began to do something that he had never done before, he started walking.

The impression of this miracle on the crowd around was so great that they shouted in their own language (which was Lycaonian), 'the gods have come down to us in human form'. Paul was evidently speaking in Greek, with which only some of them were familiar. But the two apostles did not understand the native tongue and it was not until preparations for offering sacrifice to them had begun that Paul realised the new rôle in which he and Barnabas were held. The crowd thought that they were being favoured with a divine visitation. The story of Baucis and Philemon tells how Jupiter (Zeus) and Mercury (Hermes) visited the neighbouring region of Phrygia in human form, and Jupiter (Zeus) had a temple in Lystra. This explains why the people likened the apostles to their gods. Perhaps they called Barnabas, Jupiter, because he was the elder and imposing in appearance. Mercury (Hermes) was the messenger of the gods and the spokesman of Zeus, so Paul was likened to him because he was the chief speaker. The people of Lystra evidently felt the visitors should receive suitable honours, so they prepared to sacrifice to them. When Paul and Barnabas realised this, they were filled with horror at what would have been idolatrous worship, and rushing out, shouted to them to stop, telling them they were just ordinary men. They 'rent their clothes' and among the Jews this was a gesture of horror at the sin of blasphemy (Mark 14:63). Paul used the occasion to put the facts of God's truth before them. As he was speaking to pagans who knew little about the Old Testament Scriptures, he does not refer to them, but takes the same line of argument as is recorded in Acts 17:21-32 and Romans 1:18-23, which features God as Creator. He exhorts them to turn away from *vain* idolatry which was completely empty of truth, and points to a living God who is the Creator of the universe and Provider of the good things of life, such as food and rainfall. God let the Gentile nations go their own way, for they rejected the limited light which was available to them. It was not God's indifference, but patient waiting until the right time had come to speak. So Paul restrained

these men of Lystra although it was with difficulty (verse 18).

¹⁹Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. ²⁰But after the disciples had gathered round him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

²¹They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, ²²strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said. ²³Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. ²⁴After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, ²⁵and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.

²⁶From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. ²⁷On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. ²⁸And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.' (Acts 14:19-28).

The pendulum now swings from one extreme to the other. The hostile Jews from Antioch, after driving Paul and Barnabas from that city and also from Iconium, now appear at Lystra in order to upset the witness further. They spoke to the crowd and won a considerable number of them over to their view. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, leaving him for dead. Paul refers to this when he gives a list of his sufferings for Christ (2 Cor. 11:25). While Luke does not definitely state that Paul was dead, many feel that he was. Even if this was not so, there were evidences of a miracle, for after this terrible battering he got up and went into the city. One thing that we can be sure of was that the gashes inflicted by the stones left scars

permanently. No wonder he mentioned them in Galatians 6:17 as the *stigmata*, 'marks of the Lord Jesus'. He had been branded just like slaves were treated, but they were marks of his loyalty to Christ and they were sufferings for Him.

Paul and Barnabas then went on to the frontier city of Derbe, where they preached the gospel and had a large response and so founded another assembly (church) of believers there. After this they felt it necessary to re-visit the groups at Lystra, Iconium and Antioch to strengthen and encourage them, for sooner or later they would experience persecution and trial. In doing this they showed great courage, returning so soon to these places where they had been so shamefully treated and expelled. As well as strengthening the new believers, they put them on a firm basis by appointing suitable members as leaders or elders. They needed some form of organisation. The apostles evidently relied on the Holy Spirit's guidance in their choice among new converts. And with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord Whom they now believed. They had warned them that suffering and hardship were the usual experience of the converted and they must be prepared for this (verse 22). They doubtless were taught that though this was true, the Lord would note it all and as He is in no man's debt, there was a glorious reward for those who were faithful whatever the cost (Rom. 8:17; 2 Thess. 1:4,5; 2 Tim. 2:12).

Leaving Pisidian Antioch, the apostles crossed into Pisidia, which was the furthest south of the province of Galatia, and then entered the province of Pamphylia.

They then proclaimed the Word of God at Perga, where they had called when they landed in Asia Minor from Cyprus (13:13). After this they went down to the port of Attalia, where they took a ship to Antioch in Syria. They had been gone some eighteen months and made this eventful circular tour. The Lord had been with them all the while and, in spite of all the difficulties arising from

Satan's opposition, they had fulfilled the work to which they had been set apart by the Holy Spirit and behind it all had been the prayers of the believers at Antioch (in Syria). They now had a wonderful story to tell and the believers there would be keen to know how they had fared. They evidently recounted what the Lord had done in widening His great kingdom purpose to include the Gentile and so the 'door of faith' had been opened to them through which many had passed.

The apostles remained here at Antioch for a long time (verse 28). It must have been a happy time of fellowship and rejoicing after all the privations they had endured.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

'Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." ²This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. ³The church sent them on their way, and as they travelled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad. ⁴When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

⁵Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses."' (Acts 15:1-5).

We now come to a point in Luke's history which is of utmost importance as it deals with the very fundamentals of our faith and belief. During his wonderful missionary travels, Paul had made known God's gospel of grace and justification by faith which he would later elaborate in his epistle to the Romans. This gospel was apart from merit or legal works of any kind. On such an issue compromise was utterly impossible, for essentials were at stake.

It is evident that the legalistic party of the circumcision had heard of the spread of the gospel among the Gentiles in Cyprus, Pamphylia and South Galatia (Phrygia, Pisidia and Lycaonia). They had been forced to acquiesce in the case of Cornelius and those with him, for Peter had shown that this was entirely of the Lord's doing. To them this was an exception and they were not prepared to go any further along these lines. Since Paul and Barnabas did not come to

Jerusalem, they decided to go down to Antioch and attack them there. This they did apart from the Jerusalem church as verse 24 makes clear.

In Galatians 2:4, Paul describes these Judaizers as false brethren, secretly introduced to spy out 'our liberty'. However sincere they may have been, they certainly had no conception of salvation and justification by faith in Christ alone. Their first concern was to maintain Judaism and so they insisted that Gentiles could only be saved and admitted on terms similar to proselytes to Judaism, that they must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses.

They were the same as certain who came from James, in Galatians 2:12, but they did not come with James' permission as the context in Acts shows. Doubtless they recalled that the Lord Jesus had been circumcised and had not repealed circumcision. It was false argument and something similar to this occurs today with baptism taking the place of circumcision as an example.

And so a crisis arose between spiritual Christianity and ritualistic or ceremonial religion. The issue was between salvation by works or salvation by faith in the one offering of the Lord Jesus Christ for sin on Calvary's cross and His resurrection afterwards.

No wonder Paul and Barnabas sharply disputed the matter with these opposers to the gospel of grace. They realised that the situation was so dangerous that it was absolutely necessary to discuss the whole issue with the mother church at Jerusalem otherwise there would be complete cleavage between the churches of Jerusalem and Judea, and the church at Antioch and the other churches linked with them. The brethren accordingly sent Paul and Barnabas to discuss the position with the apostles and elders at Jerusalem.

On their way there through Phoenicia and Samaria they told how many Gentiles had been converted and this made all the brethren who heard them glad indeed. They later

received a welcome from the Jerusalem church to whom they reported everything the Lord had done through them.

However, at a critical moment, the opposers intervened and declared that Gentiles must be circumcised and obey the law of Moses. The result was a further meeting of the Jerusalem leaders. After much questioning Peter replied and spoke out clearly in favour of salvation by grace. He reminded his hearers of how, about ten years before, the Gentiles had heard the gospel from his lips at the house of Cornelius, and God had given His approval by the gift of the Holy Spirit as soon as they believed, so why should further conditions be imposed on them?

⁶The apostles and elders met to consider this question. ⁷After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. ⁸God, who knows the heart, showed that He accepted them by giving them the Holy Spirit to them, just as He did to us. ⁹He made no distinction between us and them, for He purified their hearts by faith. ¹⁰Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? ¹¹No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

¹²The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. ¹³When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. ¹⁵The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

¹⁶"After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, ¹⁷that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things' ¹⁸that have been known for ages.

¹⁹"It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. ²⁰Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. ²¹For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.'" (Acts 15:6-21).

Peter likened the law to a 'yoke' which neither their fathers nor themselves could bear. It was 'through the grace of the Lord Jesus' (verse 11) they had been saved. In the same way Paul referred to the Mosaic law as a 'yoke' (Gal. 5:1). The fathers did not have the strength to carry this yoke which the Judaizers wished to put on the necks of the Gentiles. What a contrast to the easy and light yoke of the Lord Jesus! (Matt. 11:30). So Peter takes his stand boldly with Paul and Barnabas for Gentile freedom. 'We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved just as they are' (verse 11). This exactly describes the gospel that Paul preached and he never deviated from it. If the enemies were hoping that Peter would side with them, they were disappointed. The apostle had spoken clearly against salvation by ceremony and ritualism.

Paul and Barnabas then followed by telling the audience about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles, confirming their ministry. Lastly the Jerusalem leader, James, added his verdict. He was greatly respected as chief of the elders and was called James the Just. He was generally regarded as a representative of the Hebraic as opposed to the Hellenistic wing of the Jewish Christians. Doubtless the Judaizers counted on him being a champion of their view, but they must have been bitterly disappointed after James had finished speaking. He calls Peter by his Aramaic name, Symeon, and quotes from the Old Testament prophet Amos 9:11,12 (Septuagint).

It should be noted that James does not say this *fulfils* what is written by the prophet; he simply says that this *agrees* with the words of the prophet, who looks to the

future restoration of the torn down tent of David, which is a poetic figure of the throne of David (2 Sam. 7:12,13), the rule of which includes Gentiles as well as Jews. Professor A.T. Robertson writes :

‘The passage in Amos refers primarily to the restoration of the Davidic empire, but also the Messiah’s kingdom (“the throne of David His father” Luke 1:32)’.

Both in the Hebrew and the Septuagint we have ‘all the Gentiles’. James’ point is that the blessing of the Gentiles under the ministry of Paul and Barnabas was not the first occasion Gentile blessing had been in the mind and purpose of God, for this had been so since the promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3. God’s earthly kingdom must take in the Gentiles, if Christ is ever to rule over the whole world as prophecy so clearly predicts. What the passage in Amos cannot refer to is the Body of Christ (as the Schofield Bible teaches), which at this time was hidden in God (Eph. 3:8,9) and therefore not in the ministry of Amos. He is concerned with ‘things that *have been known for ages*’ (verse 18).

James’ speech must have been a shattering blow to the Judaizing party at Jerusalem. What James said showed that there was no need to fear that the four necessary points which followed would invade and spoil the scruples of the more rigid Jew, for they had Moses (the law) preached in all its fulness in the synagogue every Sabbath day (verse 21).

‘²²Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers. ²³With them they sent the following letter :

The apostles and elders, your brothers,
 To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:
 Greetings.

²⁴We have heard that some went out from us without our authorisation and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. ²⁵So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul — ²⁶men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. ²⁸*It seemed good to the Holy Spirit* and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: ²⁹You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.

Farewell.

³⁰The men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. ³¹The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. ³²Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers. ³³After spending some time there, they were sent off by the brothers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them. ³⁵But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.' (Acts 15:22-35).

The assembled church with the apostles and elders agreed with one accord to the appeals of Peter and James and as the matter was of great importance they decided to embody all of it in a letter and send it to the various churches or groups of believers. It is well to remember that this is the earliest church letter in existence. The words 'it seemed good' occur three times and it is important to note that the third time reads 'it seemed good to the Holy Spirit', so that this letter with its advice had God's approval and

therefore was according to truth (verse 28). Idolatry, fornication and murder were the outstanding sins of paganism which could not be tolerated in a Christian gathering and unity would not be possible between Jew and Gentile if these were not avoided.

The opening words of the letter were a direct blow against the legalists who were causing so much trouble. They were disturbing and troubling believers and these words were a complete repudiation of their effort to impose the Mosaic ceremonial law upon the Gentile Christians.

However, the request that these 'four necessary things' should be observed would lead in time to a line of demarcation between the churches of Judea and those of the Gentiles, and between Gentile and Jewish believers in individual churches. It is not possible to have two standards of Christian conduct in a gathering of believers. This gradually grew to become a 'middle wall of partition' which could not exist in the church of the One Body (Eph. 2:14-16 A.V.) with its close unities.

This letter is not laid down as a law, but is the sound judgment of the Jerusalem believers for the guidance of Gentiles, though it had no effect on the Judaizers who sought to unsettle the great witness of Paul in Antioch, Corinth, Galatia, Jerusalem and Rome.

Two leaders, Judas (Barsabbas) and Silas, were despatched with the letter to the church at Antioch. When this was read to the believers there, they rejoiced, which showed it was a victory for Gentile liberty. While they were at Antioch, these two brethren did much to encourage the Christians there and then they returned to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas continued with their ministry at Antioch (verse 35).

³⁶Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." ³⁷Barnabas wanted to take John, also called

Mark, with them,³⁸but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. ³⁹They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, ⁴⁰but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.' (Acts 15:36-41).

Verse 36 records the beginning of Paul's second missionary journey. Paul, like a true missionary, was anxious to go back to the places where he had planted the gospel and see how they were faring. This meant another tour of Cyprus and Asia Minor. Barnabas suggested taking John Mark with them as they had done before. Mark was a near kinsman to Barnabas and evidently there was a close tie between them. Though grieved at his cousin's failure during the first journey together, it is probable that Barnabas felt that this was past and that now Mark was ready to join them again. Paul, however, could not accept this view. He felt he had a quitter on his hands and he described Mark as one who 'withdrew' (literally, apostatized from) them and did not continue with them in the work (verse 38). He felt he could not experiment again with Mark. Both men had made up their minds and would not yield, so much so that there was a sharp disagreement between them and they parted company.

This was sad indeed. So ended the fellowship that had planted the gospel of the grace of God in Cyprus and Galatia. But God overruled it in one particular, for now there were two missionary journeys instead of one. Barnabas and Mark went to Cyprus and continued the witness there. This is the last glimpse Luke gives of Barnabas, but Paul has a kindly reference to him in 1 Corinthians 9:6. Mark later on made good with Peter (1 Pet. 5:13) and with Paul (Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11). Paul, on the other hand, chose Silas (or Silvanus to give him his Latin name), and after being commended by the brethren to

the grace of the Lord, they proceeded through Syria and Cilicia, confirming and strengthening the churches.

As we look through the New Testament record we find that Paul was kind and courteous normally, but he could be moved to burning-point when the truth was at stake. Barnabas was a Levite and a Cyprian, and therefore would have considerable influence with his own people. But the Lord was about to lead Paul to a wider field. In this second missionary journey Europe was to be entered. Paul doubtless felt the loss of a loyal companion and fellow-labourer, and Silas seemed the heaven-sent man. It would appear, from the story of their adventures in Philippi, that Silas, like Paul himself, was a Roman citizen. It would have been difficult for Paul if he, as a Roman citizen, could claim privileges that Silas could not share. Silas too was mentioned by name in the apostolic letter and had been with Paul when it was handed over to the Gentile churches, so they were not strangers.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

¹He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. ²The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. ³Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴As they travelled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. ⁵So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

⁶Paul and his companions travelled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. ⁷When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. ⁸So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. ⁹During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.' (Acts 16:1-10).

We now come to another very important event in Paul's life and ministry. Not only was he led to link himself with Silas, but at Lystra he was introduced to Timothy, a young believer who became a son in the faith to him. The boy was probably about eighteen years of age, a convert from Paul's former visit a few years before and still young twelve years later (1 Tim. 4:12). The apostle loved him devotedly (1 Tim. 5:23; 2 Tim. 1:3; 3:15; Phil. 2:20). Timothy had been well reported in his home town of Lystra. Those who had the gift of prophecy, marked him out for special service (1 Tim. 1:18). We know that Silas was a prophet (Acts 15:32) and possibly he was inspired to

indicate the Lord's will with regard to this young man. This was specially important after the defection of John Mark and also considering Timothy's sensitive nature. He had also received a special gift by Paul's laying on of his hands, which was a normal Old Testament act qualifying the recipient for service. There should be no problem here for there were other gifts given by the Holy Spirit in the Acts period which were supplementary to the miraculous sign gifts, such as wisdom (1 Cor. 12:8), and which would be just as necessary in the new dispensation after the Acts period.

Timothy was also a child of mixed parentage and this was another qualification. He could sympathise with the Gentile (the Greek) and could understand the Jew for his mother was a Jewess and his father a Greek.

Some have a difficulty in Paul's circumcising him after his stand against circumcision. To Paul circumcision and uncircumcision were nothing, but the glory and the purpose of God was all (Gal. 5:6). As Timothy could better serve the Lord when circumcised, for this enabled him to witness in the synagogue as well as outside, Paul performed the act. Upbringing, spiritual gifts, prophecies, laying on of hands and a Jewish rite, all combined to fit this young man for his high office.

And so these three set out on their journey, delivering 'the decrees for to keep' (16:4 A.V.). As problems had been removed by the decrees, the churches continued to be established in the faith, and they 'increased in number daily' (A.V.).

Going northward, the three servants of the Lord travelled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia. In this context we find that twice the guidance of the Holy Spirit prevented them from taking the wrong course and we do well to remember that the 'shut door' is just as much a part of divine guidance as the door that opens before us (see Revelation 3:7. 'He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth and no man openeth' A.V.). 'Shut

doors' may not be so pleasant as 'open doors', but they are absolutely vital to the guidance of the Lord. It is dangerous indeed to open what God has shut. Sometimes we have to wait a long while before the reason for the shut door is given.

Here in Acts, God prevented Paul and his friends from preaching in Asia, and when they came to the border of Mysia and tried to enter Bithynia, again the Lord shut the door.

They then passed by Mysia and came to Troas. This city was founded, near the site of the old city of Troy, by the successors of Alexander the Great, and named after him Alexandria Troas. It was made a Roman colony by Augustus. The doors were evidently shut because the Lord now willed that the Gospel of the grace of God should come over to Europe and this was made absolutely clear by the night vision given to Paul concerning the call of the man of Macedonia for the apostle and his friends to come over and help them (verse 9). At this point they may have thought that, coming to the sea (for Troas was a port of call for ships journeying between Asia and Macedonia) they had been prevented from going any further, unless fresh revelation was given, and this is what actually happened.

At this point, too, the writer shows in an unobtrusive way that he himself joined the party, for he continues the story in the first instead of the third person plural and this commences the beginning of the 'we' sections of the Acts which show us when Luke is with the party. Paul and his companions were at once obedient to the heavenly vision. They put out to sea and reached Samothrace and the next day went on to Neapolis.

¹¹From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. ¹²From there we travelled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

¹³On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. ¹⁵When she and the members of her household were baptised, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.' (Acts 16:11-15).

Here the apostle set foot for the first time on European soil. Neapolis served as a port for Philippi. The great military road, through Macedonia, via Egnalia, began here and it was the landing place for travellers crossing from Asia Minor. From Neapolis they travelled to Philippi. Luke tells us in this passage that Philippi was the chief city of that part of Macedonia and it was a Roman colony. As a military outpost Philippi had few Jews. There was evidently no synagogue inside the city. The rule of the rabbis required an assembly of ten men to constitute a synagogue, but here were gathered only a group of women at the hour of prayer. They had noticed an enclosure, probably as they came into the city, which was a place of prayer. Macedonian inscriptions show greater freedom for women in Macedonia than elsewhere at this time, and confirm Luke's story of the activities of women in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea.

Having sat down, Paul and his friends began to speak. Sitting was the Jewish attitude for public speaking and Luke's use of the first person plural indicates that Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke preached in turn, Paul being the chief speaker. One of the women listening was named Lydia, who was a dealer in purple dye. She was a proselyte who worshipped God and was ready for the message. Luke tells us the Lord opened her heart to respond and she in turn opened her home to them. Her birthplace was Thyatira, which was famous for its purple dyes. She was a

seller of purple fabrics and there was a great demand for this fabric as it was used in the official toga at Rome and in Roman colonies. We still use the term 'royal purple' (compare Luke 16:19).

Evidently she was a woman of some means to carry on such a business. Probably all the women there were employees of hers and it is interesting to note that she was a native of that very Asia where they had been forbidden to preach. The 'men of Macedonia' turned out to be a group of women!

Certainly a new era had dawned for Europe and for women in the conversion of Lydia. It would seem that Paul hesitated to accept her invitation to her home, but she persuaded them and responded fully to all she had heard.

¹⁶Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. ¹⁷This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." ¹⁸She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned round and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.' (Acts 16:16-18).

If Troas had proved to be an open door, Paul's added words 'and there are many adversaries' certainly fitted here (1 Cor. 16:9 A.V.). Satan again did not allow the preaching of the truth to go unchallenged. Luke records the fact that a slave girl appeared on the scene who claimed to tell fortunes and had earned her owners a large sum of money by doing so. Strange to say she seemed to be telling the truth, for she kept on declaring, 'these men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved'. Actually there is no article and the Greek text reads *a way of salvation*. There were many ways of salvation offered to men as there are today. Satan is most to be

feared when he comes 'as an angel of light' (2 Cor. 11:14) and his ministers as 'ministers of righteousness' (i.e. good-living people).

We have a similar thing in the Gospel records, for indwelling demons did not hesitate to address Christ correctly as 'Son of the Most High God' (Luke 8:28). Paul recognised that the girl was demon-possessed even though she stated the truth. He wanted no testimony from a source like this any more than he did the worship of the people of Lystra (14:14), and as she kept repeating these words for many days, the apostle, in the name of Jesus Christ, commanded the evil spirit to come out of her, which it did instantly (verse 18). For a similar reason we may remember that the Lord Jesus commanded these demons not to make Him known as the Messiah (Mark 1:34 margin). There were other occasions in the Acts where Satan sought to spoil the witness in this way (Acts 8:9-24; 13:6-11; 17:18; 19:13-16).

Having failed in this case, the enemy stirred up persecution to do the same thing as he had already done (see Acts 4; Acts 7:8; Acts 8; Acts 9:23,29; Acts 12; Acts 13; Acts 14).

¹⁹When the owners of the slave girl realised that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market-place to face the authorities. ²⁰They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar ²¹by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practise."

²²The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. ²³After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. ²⁴Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

²⁵About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. ²⁷The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

²⁹The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

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

³⁵When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: "Release those men." ³⁶The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace."

³⁷But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out."

³⁸The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. ³⁹They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. ⁴⁰After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the

brothers and encouraged them. Then they left.’ (Acts 16:19-40).

In the context we are dealing with (Acts 16), the employers of the slave girl, seeing that their money was gone from her soothsaying, attacked Paul and Silas, taking them to the rulers and charging them with upsetting the whole city and advocating customs that Romans could not accept or practise. The crowd joined with and supported them. As a consequence, the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and flogged and then thrown into prison, with their feet fastened in the stocks. Later Paul stated that he had been beaten in this way three times (2 Cor. 11:25). After this cruel treatment one would not be surprised to find Paul and Silas moaning because of the extreme pain and discomfort, but instead of this they spent the time praying and praising God by singing hymns to Him (probably the Psalms). The other prisoners were listening to them and they must have been amazed. Then suddenly God intervened, as He had done when Peter was imprisoned, and an earthquake shook the foundations of the prison, opening the prison doors and loosing the chains on the prisoners.

The jailor was suddenly awakened, and seeing what had happened drew his sword to commit suicide, for he knew he was responsible for the prisoners with his life (12:19; 27:42). Paul stopped him in time by shouting that no one had escaped; they were all there. The man, being terrified, then fell down before Paul and Silas and asked what he should do to be saved (verse 30). The answer from both was the same as that which Peter gave Cornelius (10:43) :

‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved — you and your household’ (verse 31).

The result was that he and his family did this and were saved. The jailor did his best to atone for what he had done to the prisoners by washing their wounds. After this they were baptised, and there must have been water there to make this possible.

The next day the jailor was ordered to release Paul and Silas. But when told this, Paul said, 'we are Roman citizens. We were beaten without trial and thrown into prison. Let the magistrates come and escort us out'.

The jailer reported this to the magistrates who immediately became alarmed, for they realised they had seriously transgressed Roman law. So they had to eat humble pie and do this very thing which they must have hated. It must have been a bitter pill for them. They kept on begging Paul and Silas to leave for fear of future trouble (*erotas* in the imperfect tense). The two leaders went to Lydia's house where they met other believers and Luke adds 'they encouraged them'. One would have thought that it would have been the other way round, that Paul and Silas needed the encouragement after all they had suffered!

This was a terrible beginning for the apostles' testimony in Europe, but Satan's twofold attack had failed and the gospel standard was firmly planted in Europe. Two households were saved before Paul departed. Paul, by the grace of the Lord, was proof against both flattery and the frown of man.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

We should note at the beginning of this chapter that the 'we' changes to 'they' (verse 1), showing that Luke apparently stayed behind. He joins them again in Philippi in 20:5, which gives us the second 'we' section of the Acts.

'When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. ²As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said. ⁴Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.

⁵But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the market-place, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. ⁶But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, ⁷and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus." ⁸When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. ⁹Then they put Jason and the others on bail and let them go.' (Acts 17:1-9).

Paul and Silas now took the Roman road, the Egnatian way to Thessalonica, that is through Amphipolis, roughly 33 miles; from there they went to Apollonia, another 30 miles, and from there to Thessalonica, 37 miles. It was a journey of about a hundred miles altogether, and they possibly stayed a night at the former city, Thessalonica (our modern Salonika). It was a great commercial city and

the capital of the second of the four divisions of Macedonia, and finally the capital of the whole province. It was a strategic centre for the spread of the gospel as Paul said later, for the good news of the kingdom and the gospel sounded forth from the Thessalonian believers throughout Macedonia and Achaia (1 Thess. 1:8).

In verse three Luke tells us that the first thing the apostle did was to go to the Jewish synagogue. This was 'his custom', and we remember at Syrian Antioch he had said that it was *necessary* that he should do this (Acts 13:46), for Israel were still the covenant people and the human centre of God's earthly kingdom purpose, even though they were falling more and more into unbelief and opposition to God's will.

This was a repetition of their attitude to the Lord Jesus, their Messiah, King and Saviour.

Luke says nothing about the physical condition of Paul and Silas after their physical torture, but in 1 Thessalonians 2:1,2 Paul wrote :

'You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. ²We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you His gospel in spite of strong opposition.'

The Christian church began in the Jewish synagogue and was not separated from it until this second missionary journey was over (Acts 19:9). The people of Israel were the custodians of the Word of God — the Old Testament (Rom. 3:1,2). So Paul wisely, for three successive Sabbaths, opened and explained these Scriptures, pointing out that they foretold that Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead, and that this Jesus was the Messiah (Christ) who had fulfilled these prophecies (verses 2,3). He therefore reminds the Thessalonians in his first epistle 'for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again' (1 Thess. 4:14) — thus bringing in His death and resurrection. That this was

necessary was made clear by the Lord Himself in Luke 24:25-27.

We should always remember that we have only two sources of information regarding the subject matter of Paul's ministry: the record of the Acts where the churches are first founded and the subsequent epistles where they are given added teaching. It would be good for us all, when we read of the churches described in the Acts, to read also the epistles sent to these churches and compare the teaching of both, for one explains the other.

The apostle followed this method elsewhere, as 1 Corinthians 15 makes clear :

³For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins *according to the Scriptures*, ⁴that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day *according to the Scriptures*' (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

All Christian teaching, to be of lasting value, must rest four square on the Word of God. This has been largely forgotten by the churches today. How many sermons are expositions of the sacred Scriptures? No wonder there is so much ignorance of Christ and the truth of God at the present time.

As a result of Paul's faithful proclamation and explanation of the Word of God at Thessalonica, there was a big response, for 'some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women' (verses 3,4). These God-fearing Gentiles were less under the control of the rabbis and so responded more readily to the apostle's appeal. In Macedonia, women had more freedom than elsewhere and many of them took their stand for Christ.

It was not to be for long, however, that the work was free from opposition. Satan always saw to this and still does. As Paul could not be found, Jason, in whose house he had stayed, was dragged before the 'rulers of the city' (A.V.). The word used here for rulers or officials in some

Macedonian towns is *politarchs*, a term not used before this chapter or afterwards. Here, once more, Luke shines out as a faithful historian, for although the names relating to Roman officials varied from place to place, Luke never makes a mistake.

The mob made charges against the believers which were twisted from the truth that had been given. The *kingdom* of God had been proclaimed, but it was a very different kingdom from those obtaining in the world at that time. Doubtless they referred to the Lord Jesus as 'King', which was a title given to Caesar. Rome tolerated religions as long as they did not compromise Caesar's position as Emperor and Ruler. When this happened they suppressed them ruthlessly.

The city was thrown into turmoil and as a result they put Jason and the others on bail and let them go (verse 9).

¹⁰As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. ¹²Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

¹³When the Jews in Thessalonica learned Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. ¹⁴The brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. ¹⁵The men who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.' (Acts 17:10-15).

Not wanting to increase the trouble, the brethren at Thessalonica felt that it would be safer for Paul and Silas to go on to Berea by night. This was about 50 – 60 miles southward. It was at Berea that Timothy rejoined them. In spite of all the opposition from the Jews, Paul went straight away to the synagogue there as usual.

Luke now comments on the Berean believers:

‘Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true’ (verse 11).

This was commendation indeed, for Paul stated in his first letter to the Thessalonian church that they had become ‘a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia’ (1 Thess. 1:7).

The wise Berean believers did more. They brought the teaching given by Paul to the touchstone of the Holy Scriptures to test whether it was God’s truth or not. If only all who profess to be believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and claim to be true witnesses for Him would do the same, it would end so much of the false teaching that is rampant today. Alas, so many Christians do not know their Bible well enough to do this. Many churches do not expound the Word of God or urge their listeners to search its pages. The Berean believers did it with ‘great eagerness’, which was essential if they were constantly studying and comparing what God had written and preserved in His Word. It turned them into sound Bible students.

As a result many Jews believed as well as a number of prominent women and also Greek men. We know the name of one of them, Sopater, son of Pyrrhus, mentioned in 20:4 and Romans 16:21.

As before, the Jews of Thessalonica, hearing that the apostles had arrived at Berea, sent a number there to stir up further trouble (verse 13), just as the Jews from Antioch in Pisidia had pursued Paul to Iconium and Lystra. The brethren at Berea acted swiftly. It is not clear whether Paul went all the way to Athens by land, or took ship and sailed to Athens. He must have been grieved to cut short his profitable ministry in Macedonia, but Silas and Timothy remained behind in Berea and they would keep the witness going. The friends conducted Paul to Athens to make sure

of his safe arrival and then left with his instructions to Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

¹⁶While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the market-place day by day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?" ²⁰You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean." ²¹(All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas).' (Acts 17:16-21).

Athens was the metropolis of the world's wisdom, the city of philosophy, culture and art, yet in spite of this, a city of superstition, idolatry and moral darkness. But Paul was ready to give his witness there. He reasoned in the synagogue to the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, but Luke concentrates on Paul's speech to the philosophers and gives a summary of it. In the market-place he conversed with the two classes of philosophers, the Stoics and the Epicureans. While waiting for Silas and Timothy, Paul walked around the city and noted that it was full of idols. The idolatry and sensualism stared at him. Pliny states that in the time of Nero Athens had over 30,000 public statues besides countless private ones in the homes. Pausanias says that Athens had more images in the time of Nero than all the rest of Greece put together. Petronius said that it was easier to find a god than a man in Athens.

The Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were always ready for an argument, so they frequented the market-place for that purpose. Both disdained Paul, but there were rival

practical philosophies of the day. The Stoics took their attitude from Zeno (360-260 B.C.) He taught in the *Stoa* (porch) and so his teaching was called Stoicism. They were pantheists and fatalists. They taught that the Deity pervades the matter of the world and they undermined the doctrines of Providence, personal responsibility and judgment to come. They believed that under the one God were divine beings called demons, who acted as mediators.

The Epicureans were atheists and denied a future life. They claimed pleasure to be the chief thing that can be extracted from this life. They accepted the existence of gods but regarded them as unconcerned with human life. They believed that the world came together by chance, 'a fortuitous concourse of atoms'. The doctrines of the two schools have been summed up in the words 'Pride and Pleasure'.

In Epicureanism, it was man's sensual nature that was against the claims of the Gospel; in Stoicism it was his self-righteousness and pride of intellect. Both these philosophies were widely prevalent over the world.

We are probably not wrong if we think that this situation was one of the most difficult Paul had to face.

The philosophers asked 'what is this babblers trying to say?' The word translated 'babbler' (*spermologos*) means 'seed-picker', like a bird picking up chance seeds. Eustathius uses it of a man hanging around the markets picking up scraps of food that fell from carts, and so of those who picked up scraps of wisdom from others.

The question was contemptuous and one of supreme ridicule. Others remarked that Paul seemed to be introducing foreign gods, because he spoke of 'Jesus and the resurrection'.

Then they took hold of him and brought him to the Areopagus (the Hill of Mars) where a court was held. This was not for trial as a criminal, but for examination concerning his new teaching in this university city, whether

it was legal or not. They started off politely, asking if they might know what this new teaching was. Perhaps there was sarcasm in it as well. They told the apostle that he was bringing strange ideas to them which they found rather shocking. Luke adds that all the Athenians spent their time talking and listening to new ideas.

Alas, this is still true today. Some Christians wish only to hear new ideas about the Bible and its contents. They get tired of the old truths, and this can become a snare. They are like those with 'itching ears' that Paul warns Timothy about in 2 Timothy 4:3,4. In Athens the 'new' soon became stale with these querulous philosophers.

Paul seized the opportunity to preach Christ to this strange audience. He does not speak like a man on trial, but as one who is endeavouring to get a hearing for the gospel of Christ and he uses great wisdom in doing so.

He does not refer to the Old Testament Scriptures for these were not recognised by his hearers. He bases his argument on the God of creation. It starts with God the Creator and ends with God the Judge of all. He tells them that they were evidently very religious. The word he used was *deisidaimon* (literally 'to fear deity'). It is a neutral word, either meaning pious in the good sense or superstitious in the bad sense. The Authorised Version has 'too superstitious', but it seems unlikely that the apostle should give this Athenian audience a slap in the face at the beginning of an address to win them over to the truth of Christ. Paul knew how to be both faithful and tactful. The N.I.V. is better by rendering the phrase, 'you are very religious'.

He goes on to say that he noticed the city had an inscription 'To the Unknown God'. We know from other writers that this was a fact. The inscription enabled Paul to sum up what he was going to tell them.

²²Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are

very religious. ²³For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

²⁴"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in Temples built by hands. ²⁵And He is not served by human hands, as if He needed anything, because He Himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. ²⁶From one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. ²⁷God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. ²⁸'For in Him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are His offspring.'

²⁹"Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone — an image made by man's design and skill. ³⁰In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹For He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the Man He has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising Him from the dead.'" (Acts 17:22-31).

Since the Athenians acknowledged their ignorance of the divine Being and nature of God, Paul declared that he would tell them the truth about Him. He was the One God Who created the heaven and the earth, not like the 30,000 gods of the Athenians all doing different things. The real God was Lord, the absolute possessor of the whole creation, not parts of it.

He did not need anything that human hands could supply. This must have sounded strange to his hearers who thought that the gods needed their offerings for complete happiness. In other words the real God was self-sufficient and is the source of life, breath, and everything. In saying

this Paul rises above all the Greek philosophers and their ideas.

In verse 26 the apostle affirms the unity of the human race with a common origin and with God as Creator. God's hand appears in the history of all men and controls it without denial of human responsibility such as was involved in the Stoic idea of fate. God controls the times and the places where men should be, just as the Lord Jesus spoke of the 'times of the Gentiles' (Luke 21:24) and the earthly inheritance of Israel. There is interplay between the will of God and the activities and responsibility of man, difficult as it is for us to see with our shortened and small vision.

God's object was that man whom He created should seek after Him and find Him, not as the nations had done in turning away from Him (Rom. 1:18-32). In verse 28 we have a proof of His nearness but not the pantheism of the Stoics. The three verbs here form an ascending scale and reach a climax in God (life, movement, existence). Paul even quotes from their poets. Aratus of Soli in Cilicia (about 270 B.C.) has similar words in his *Ta Phainomina*. Paul, of course, knew that their words were written of Zeus (Jupiter), not of Jehovah, but he applies the idea in them that all men originate from God. He also quoted Menander in 1 Corinthians 15:32 and Epimenides in Titus 1:12. But there is a great difference between the relation of men to God in the original creation, and the relation through redemption whereby men become the sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus (John 1:12). Man cannot get to know God by making images of his own creation, and this is why God forbid, in the Law, the making of any image of Himself. Of course men will say that they are not worshipping the images as they are only symbols of invisible deity, but the fact remains that many worshippers pay divine homage to the images before them.

God's greatness cannot be expressed in gold, silver or stone. The time when men thought this could be done was

a time of ignorance, which God in His mercy overlooked, not 'winked at' A.V.. He allowed the nations to walk in their own ways (14:16). But now, in view of the full revelation of God through Jesus Christ, He calls all men to repent of their former ignorance and disobedience, and submit to the true knowledge of God made known in the Gospel of Christ the Lord and Saviour.

And because of this, He has appointed a day in which He will 'judge the world in righteousness', which means perfect justice. Not only is this time fixed, but the One Who judges is settled too, and He is the Lord Jesus Christ Who has 'authority to execute judgment, because He is a son of man' (John 5:27) and has been raised from the dead by the Father with this in mind (verse 31). Paul had himself seen the risen Christ. So ended Paul's address to the philosophers. It was a masterly exposition of God's place and power in human history.

The idea of a resurrection of dead men did not appeal to many of his listeners for had not their teachers declared that there is no such experience?

³²When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." ³³At that, Paul left the Council. ³⁴A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.' (Acts 17:32-34).

There was mixed reaction to all they had heard. Nevertheless it was not without result, for a member of the Areopagus, Dionysius, responded, and so did a woman named Damaris, and there were several more. It is possible that Damaris was a God-fearer who had heard Paul speak in the synagogue. The popular idea that Paul afterwards was disillusioned by his line of approach, because when he reached the next city, Corinth, he declared he would know nothing but 'Jesus Christ and Him crucified' has 'little to commend it' as F.F. Bruce states.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN.

'After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ²There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, ³and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. ⁴Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.' (Acts 18:1-4).

From Athens Paul moved on to Corinth, 50 miles away. Julius Caesar had refounded the derelict city in 46 B.C. and it was given the status of a Roman colony. It had two ports, Lechaenum and Cenchreae, and it became the capital of the Roman province of Achaia. It was the chief commercial city of Greece and was the Vanity Fair of the Empire with its cosmopolitan population and its low state of morals. The Temple of Aphrodite had a thousand prostitutes and the very word Corinthianize meant immorality. Paul had had problems with the cities he had touched, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea and Athens, but what could he expect from Corinth? He might have been excused from taking his witness there, but, contrary to expectations, the Lord told him in a night vision :

'Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. ¹⁰For I am with you, and no-one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city' (18:9,10).

So instead of giving it a casual visit, Paul stayed there a year and a half. At the same time, one can understand the moral problems that faced believers at Corinth and this is evident in the two epistles that he wrote to believers there. Truly God's ways are not our ways, but Paul's faith was large enough to trust the Lord under all conditions and to do His will however difficult it was.

Paul soon met a married couple, Aquila and Priscilla, who had lately come from Rome. They had been forced to leave this city because there had been trouble with the Jews there and Claudius had commanded that all Jews should leave Rome (verse 2). Finding that Aquila was of the same craft as himself, tent-making and leather-working, Paul stayed with them and formed a life-long friendship with them. Paul regularly earned his living in this way during his missionary journeys. Rabbi Judah says: 'he that teacheth not his son a trade, doth the same as if he taught him to be a thief'. It was not considered right for a scribe or rabbi to receive payment for his teaching of the law, so because of this and the fact that he wanted to avoid being a burden to the churches Paul worked and made portable tents of leather or cloth of goat's hair.

The apostle was on his own, so he specially appreciated being able to be a partner in the common trade with this noble man and his wife. All the churches were indebted to them as well as Paul (Rom. 16:3,4).

Once more Paul took the opportunity of giving his witness first to the Jews in the synagogue, for he reasoned with them every Sabbath (verse 4).

⁵When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. ⁶But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

⁷Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshipper of God. ⁸Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptised.

⁹One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. ¹⁰For I am with you, and no-one is going to attack and harm you,

because I have many people in this city." ¹¹So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the Word of God.' (Acts 18:5-11).

The apostle was rejoined by Silas and Timothy a little later. He was greatly relieved to get Timothy's news about the way the converts at Thessalonica had endured the opposition they had received. At the same time Timothy and Silas brought a gift of money from the generous church at Philippi, and in his later letter to them he acknowledged his indebtedness (Phil. 4:15,16).

This enabled Paul to give up for the time being his tent-work and devote the time to proclaiming the good news that the Lord Jesus was the true Messiah and Saviour.

But the seemingly inevitable happened. Once more the Jewish enmity was manifested and they opposed and blasphemed. On two occasions Paul announced in a synagogue that because of their opposition and blasphemy, he would turn to the local Gentiles. This happened at Antioch and here at Corinth. He had faithfully made known the gospel of grace, so his responsibility was finished as regards the Jew. However, he had not to go far before finding someone's response. Adjoining the synagogue was a house of one Titius Justus, a God-fearer who had listened to Paul and believed his message. Sir William Ramsay has pointed out that he was probably the 'Gaius mine host' of Romans 16:23 (A.V.) and the Gaius, the apostle referred to in 1 Corinthians 1:14, whom he baptised. At the same time he mentions Crispus, who was no less than the ruler of the synagogue he had just left, and many more believed the Gospel as well (18:7,8).

¹²While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him into court. ¹³"This man," they charged, "is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law."

¹⁴Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to the Jews, "If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanour or serious crime, it would be reasonable

for me to listen to you. ¹⁵But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law — settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things." ¹⁶So he had them ejected from the court. ¹⁷Then they all turned on Sosthenes the synagogue ruler and beat him in front of the court. But Gallio showed no concern whatever.' (Acts 18:12-17).

The Jewish opposers this time went further. Instead of complaining to the magistrates who only had local power, this time they went to the Roman governor who would be likely to influence other governors and they tried to get a verdict from him that would stop Paul's activity over the Empire. At this time he was Gallio the son of the elder Seneca and a brother of Seneca the philosopher (3 B.C. - A.D. 65). He was well spoken of. His brother said 'no mortal is so pleasant to any one person as Gallio is to everybody'.

The enemies brought the charge against Paul of propagating a religion not authorised by Roman law. Judaism was allowed by Rome as long as the Jews did not seek to convert Romans to it, but the opposers claimed that the gospel Paul preached was foreign to their religion and ought to be banned. Paul was prepared to conduct his own defence, but when Gallio listened to the charges, he decided that Paul was only proclaiming a variety of Judaism that was disliked by the Jewish colony in Corinth. Had the charge related to a real breach of Roman law, he said he would have taken it up, but in his estimation it was just a disagreement about Judaism and its terminology and the Jews must settle it themselves. So he turned them out of the court.

The Jewish complainers were furious and turned their spite on Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue and beat him in front of the court; but 'Gallio showed no concern whatever' (verse 17). It was not that he was indifferent to what was going on, but as he had just made clear, he would not be involved with Jewish religious beliefs, and so he turned a blind eye to what had happened.

Gallio's verdict was really a great help to Paul. For the next 10 years or so till imperial policy changed towards Christians it meant that he was free to deliver his message in the provinces of the empire without fear of coming into conflict with Roman law. Thus we see the working of God, so that His purpose in the spreading of His truth was not spoiled or prevented by man. God's plan must be completed.

¹⁸Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken. ¹⁹They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. ²⁰When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. ²¹But as he left, he promised, "I will come back if it is God's will." Then he set sail from Ephesus.' (Acts 18:18-21).

The apostle stayed on at Corinth for some time, taking full advantage of the liberty he had won. He then left the brethren and sailed for Syria with Aquila and Priscilla from Cenchrea, the eastern port of Corinth. Before leaving, he assumed a vow to the Lord (Num. 6:1-21), which was an Old Testament act of thanksgiving or of dedication to God. During the period of the vow, the devotee allowed his hair to grow uncut, and at the end of the period he cut his hair. As Paul came to Cenchrea, on his way to Syria and Palestine, the time of the vow was completed and he therefore cut his hair (verse 18). We are not told by Luke why Paul had taken this vow. It may have been a thank-offering for the outcome at Corinth. Paul and his friends reached Ephesus and here Aquila and Priscilla stayed for some years. This great city was the capital of the province of Asia and there was a large colony of Jews there. It was the home of the worship of Artemis (Diana), with a wonderful Temple which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

At Ephesus he again entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews, but although they asked him to stay longer with them, he declined. The words 'I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem' (verse 21, A.V.), are lacking in the majority of texts. Apart from this explanation the reason for Paul's haste in returning to Palestine is unexplained by Luke, so we have to accept this. The two brief verses (22-23) summarize the long journey from Ephesus to Palestine and his return. Nothing of moment seems to have happened, no conference with the leaders at Jerusalem, and no turmoil or riot among the Jews. The church that Paul greeted was certainly the church in Jerusalem, although the city is not mentioned. Jerusalem was not the centre of Paul's activity, but rather Antioch, where he received the definite call to evangelize the Gentiles.

After a little while spent among friends, the apostle was on the road once more.

²²When he landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch.

²³After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and travelled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.' (Acts 18:22,23).

Paul's ship from Ephesus brought him to Caesarea, the Mediterranean port of Palestine. When he had completed what he had to do at Jerusalem, he went down to Syrian Antioch (11:27) from which he had set out on his previous missionary journeys. From Antioch Paul travelled through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples he had made in his previous visit, and then his way was open to Ephesus.

²⁴Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. ²⁵He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervour and taught about Jesus accurately, though

he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

²⁷When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. ²⁸For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that 'Jesus was the Christ.' (Acts 18:24-28).

Between Paul's departure from Ephesus after his short visit to it, and his return there after going to Palestine and Syria, Luke records that a Jew named Apollos arrived at Ephesus. He was a native of Alexandria, a learned man who had a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures. However, his knowledge of baptism only went as far as that instituted by John the Baptist. From what he had learned of the Lord Jesus, he was convinced that He was the true Messiah and in his ministry he had stressed this by his expert handling of the Old Testament.

When Aquila and Priscilla heard him give his fine exposition of the Scriptures in the synagogue, they realised that they could fill the gaps in his knowledge of recent events, so they invited him to their home and did this. 'They ... explained to him the way of God more adequately' (verse 26). This strengthened his testimony and he went to Corinth with a letter of introduction from his Ephesian friends and greatly helped believers there, preaching also to the Jews outside, refuting their arguments and proving from the Scriptures that the Lord Jesus Christ was the Messiah.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

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

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

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

"John's baptism," they replied.

⁴Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the One coming after him, that is, in Jesus." ⁵On hearing this, they were baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. ⁷There were about twelve men in all.' (Acts 19:1-7).

In this chapter Luke records how Paul met twelve men whose spiritual knowledge was as defective as Apollos' knowledge had been. They had received the baptism of John the Baptist and no more. John had spoken of a coming baptism of the Holy Spirit together with the coming of Christ, but now this had actually happened and apparently they had not heard that this was so. Paul explained it to them. Note that '*when* you believed' of verse two N.I.V. is much better than the A.V. '*since* ye believed. Their belief and the baptism of the Holy Spirit happened together. As they had now come into the deeper knowledge of the witness of Christ and His resurrection, they were baptised afresh and when Paul laid his hands on them they received the Holy Spirit and the Pentecostal gifts as others had done.

Ephesus increased in importance from a spiritual standpoint. It was to be a new centre for the Gentile mission, next in importance to Antioch in Syria. Ephesus

was the capital city of Asia and the province included great cities like Smyrna, Pergamon, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea (the 7 churches of Revelation 2 & 3), Colossae, and Hierapolis. For two years the witness went on and during this time the churches at Colossae, Hierapolis and Laodicea were founded. Asia was fully evangelized (19:10) and became one of the leading centres of Christianity for centuries afterwards.

⁸Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. ⁹But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. ¹⁰This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

¹¹God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, ¹²so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.

¹³Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out."

¹⁴Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. ¹⁵One day the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" ¹⁶Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

¹⁷When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honour. ¹⁸Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. ¹⁹A number who had practised sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. ²⁰In this way the word

of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.' (Acts 19:8-20).

Paul, on coming back to Ephesus, started his synagogue witness again as he had promised. For 3 months he made known the kingdom of God (verse 8) and the gospel which gave the entrance to it. Some expositors make the mistake of taking the kingdom of God to be nothing more than the gospel of grace to the unsaved. But holy Scripture makes it quite clear that, while this is the essential beginning, this kingdom ministry goes far wider and finally covers the whole earth (Isa. 11:9; Zech. 14:9). Nothing less than this can fully fulfil the many prophecies that set it forth.

Yet again Paul experienced the violent opposition of the Jews. They slandered 'The Way' and the situation was so grave that he abandoned the synagogue and used the lecture hall of a teacher named Tyrannus as his headquarters. Apparently Paul had use of the building from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m..

Luke now points out that God mightily supported Paul's witness by granting special or extraordinary miracles to be performed. Even a piece of cloth which Paul had used healed the sick; this reminds us of those who touched the fringe of Christ's clothing (Mark 5:27; 6:56) and were likewise healed.

How different it was after the Acts period, which ended with the chosen nation of Israel being laid aside in unbelief (Acts 28). A new revelation was here given to believers and a new dispensation began. Paul now could not heal, for he told the Philippian church that Epaphroditus was seriously ill and near to death, and he had to leave it to the Lord's mercy to heal him (Phil. 2:25-27). Trophimus he left ill at Miletum (2 Tim. 4:20) and for Timothy's 'frequent illnesses' he recommends a little wine for his stomach's sake (1 Tim. 5:23). These were valued and faithful servants who greatly aided the apostle, and surely he would have healed them if he had still had the power to do so. Miraculous healing was one of the Pentecostal

sign-gifts of the Holy Spirit which confirmed the earthly kingdom testimony just as it had done with the earthly kingdom ministry of the Lord Jesus.

Demon possession was one of Satan's attempts to ruin the kingdom purpose of God, hence the Lord's constant exorcising them and delivering people from their power.

This same line of attack continued through the Acts together with other methods as we have seen.

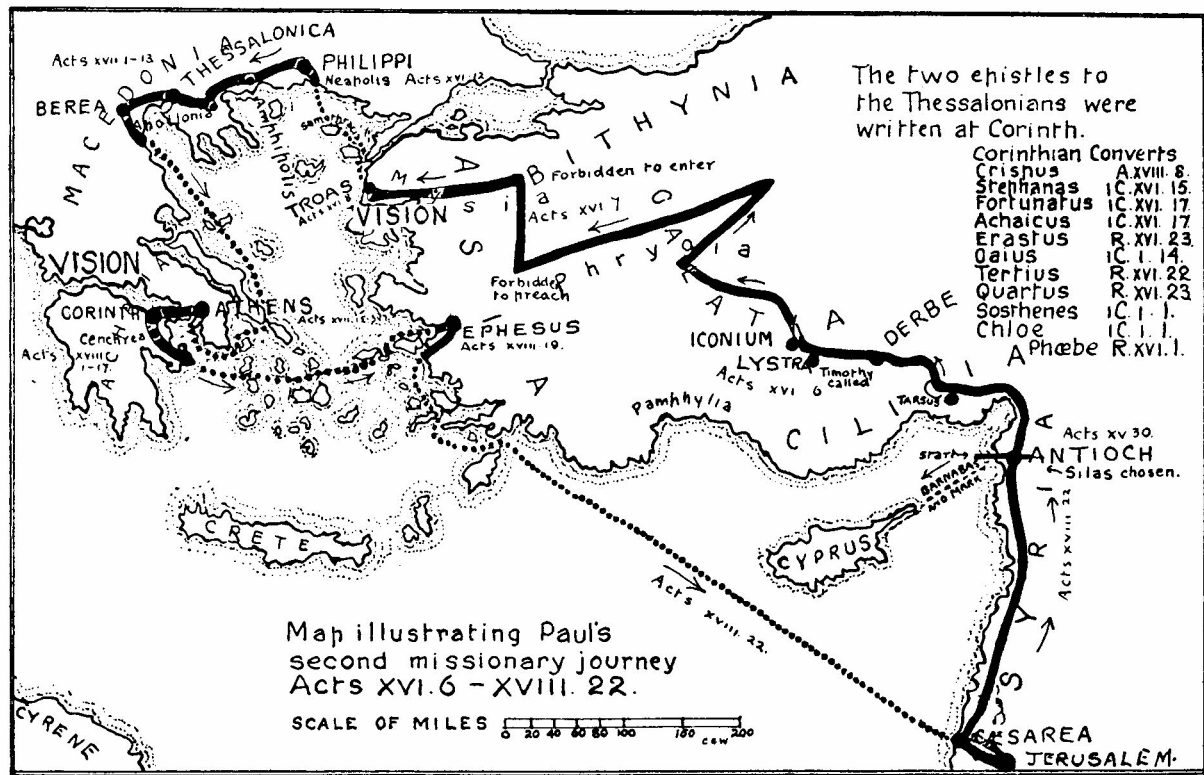
Paul not only healed the sick, but, like the Lord, he exorcised these evil spirits. Luke gives an account of this in verses 13-16.

Some Jews, evidently watching how Paul exorcised evil spirits by using the name of Christ, tried to do the same. There were seven sons of a Jewish chief priest, named Sceva, who attempted to drive out an evil spirit in this way, but the evil spirit challenged them and finally caused the man who was possessed to jump on them and overpower them. They managed to escape, but they ran away naked and bleeding.

When this became known among the Jews and Greeks, they were greatly sobered by what they heard (verse 17). Ephesus, in antiquity, had the reputation of being a centre of magical practice, but the gospel prospered among them with the result that many came to Paul and confessed what they had done and they brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. They had a value of fifty thousand drachmas, which was a considerable sum of money.

In this way, the powers of darkness were defeated. Luke's comment here was 'In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power' (verse 20).

²¹After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. "After I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome also." ²²He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer.' (Acts 19:21,22).



It is interesting and helpful to notice the parallels between Peter and Paul.*

The Parallel between Peter and Paul.

Peter	Paul
Peter received a new name (John 1:42).	Paul was named Saul at the first (Acts 13).
Peter was baptised by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2).	Paul was separated by the Spirit (Acts 13).
Peter was thought to be drunk (Acts 2).	Paul was thought to be mad (Acts 26).
Peter's first sermon (Acts 2).	Paul's first sermon (Acts 13).
Peter heals a lame man (Acts 3).	Paul heals a lame man (Acts 14).
Peter strikes with death (Acts 5).	Paul strikes with blindness (Acts 13).
Peter's first miracle has dispensational foreshadowing (Acts 3).	Paul's first miracle has dispensational foreshadowing (Acts 13).
Peter repudiates silver and gold (Acts 3).	Paul repudiates silver and gold (Acts 20).
Peter is arrested (Acts 4).	Paul is arrested (Acts 21).
Peter stands before the Council (Acts 4).	Paul stands before the Council (Acts 23).
Peter's action produces fear (Acts 5).	Paul's action produces fear (Acts 19).
Peter's shadow had healing power (Acts 5).	Paul's body gave handkerchiefs healing virtue (Acts 19).
Peter benefits by liberal Gamaliel (Acts 5).	Paul benefits by liberal Gallio (Acts 18).
Peter communicates the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands (Acts 8).	Paul communicates the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands (Acts 19).

*See, *From Pentecost to Prison* p.9, by C.H.Welch.

Peter condemns Simon Magus (Acts 8).

Peter raises Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9).

Peter's first Gentile convert had a Latin name (Acts 10).

Peter at midday has a vision and hears a voice (Acts 10).

Peter is almost worshipped by Cornelius (Acts 10).

Peter is delivered from prison by an angel (Acts 12).

Peter goes immediately to the house of Mary (Acts 12).

Peter said he was ready for prison and death for the Lord's sake (Luke 22:33).

Peter was not taught by flesh and blood (Matt. 16).

Peter goes to Babylon (1 Pet. 5:13).

Paul condemns Bar-Jesus (Acts 13).

Paul raises Eutychus from the dead (Acts 20).

Paul's first Gentile convert had a Latin name (Acts 13).

Paul at midday has a vision and hears a voice (Acts 26).

Paul is almost worshipped by Lycaonians (Acts 14).

Paul is delivered from prison by an earthquake (Acts 16).

Paul goes immediately to the house of Lydia (Acts 16).

Paul said he was ready for prison and death for the Lord's sake (Acts 21:13).

Paul conferred not with flesh and blood (Gal. 1:16).

Paul goes to Rome (Acts 28:16).

There is a good deal in common between the ministries of these two apostles and leaders. But one thing is shown clearly, Paul's ministry was quite independent of Peter's. God infallibly guided His two servants to further His great redemptive plan for the world and establish His kingdom.

At the point we have now reached in the narrative, Luke mentions Paul's intention to visit his friends in Macedonia and Achaia (verse 21) but does not give us any reason for his wishing to do this. However, we shall not go far wrong if we link it with his desire to hand over to the leaders of the Jerusalem church the gift of money the Gentile churches had collected for them. He sent two of his fellow-workers, Timothy and Erastus, across to Macedonia in advance of his own journey there (verse 22).

²³About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. ²⁴A silversmith named Demetrius, who

made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen. ²⁵He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said: "Men, you know we receive a good income from this business. ²⁶And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all. ²⁷There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the Temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshipped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty."

²⁸When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" ²⁹Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's travelling companions from Macedonia, and rushed as one man into the theatre. ³⁰Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. ³¹Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theatre.

³²The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. ³³The Jews pushed Alexander to the front, and some of the crowd shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defence before the people. ³⁴But when they realised he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

³⁵The city clerk quietened the crowd and said: "Men of Ephesus, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the Temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? ³⁶Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to be quiet and not do anything rash. ³⁷You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed Temples nor blasphemed our goddess. ³⁸If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can

press charges. ³⁹If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. ⁴⁰As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of today's events. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it." ⁴¹After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.' (Acts 19:23-41).

The remainder of the chapter deals with the riot at Ephesus, yet another attempt on the part of Satan to hinder and spoil the witness. At Ephesus was the magnificent Temple of the Greek Artemis, which was one of the seven wonders of the world. Pliny gives us a description of this Temple which, he said, was 425 feet in length, 220 feet broad and supported by a hundred or more columns, each of which had been contributed by a prince, one of them being the famous Croesus. It was a place of utter corruption and idolatry. This temple was also a treasury in which a large portion of the wealth of western Asia was stored up. Guhl, a German writer, says that the Ephesian temple was, in the ancient world, rather what the Bank of England is in modern times. The Ephesian Artemis was quite distinct from the Greek Artemis, the sister of Apollo, and the Diana of the Romans. Artemis was the goddess of fertility. At Ephesus there existed a large trade in silver shrines of the goddess and a man named Demetrius was one of its principal craftsman.

In May there was a great festival which gave Demetrius and his fellow-workers a good deal of trade and plenty of money. Paul's faithful preaching of the gospel had cut the nerve of their business. Luke gives a summary of one of Demetrius' speeches to those of the same trade (verses 24-27). He pointed out to them that Paul had led astray large numbers of people in pointing out that man-made gods are no gods at all. The divine majesty of Artemis and the reputation of her temple were being degraded and worship completely spoiled. He worked on the crowd who were listening to him. Of course he was thinking chiefly about his own pocket and he knew that, by stressing the loss of

money, he would gather a large number of supporters, and soon they were shouting, 'great is Artemis of the Ephesians'. Soon the whole city was in uproar and a demonstration was staged in the great open air theatre of the city whose ruins can be seen today. It was capable of seating some 25,000 people. Some go as far as estimating 56,000. As the crowd pressed into the theatre, they seized two of Paul's number, Gaius of Derbe and Aristarchus of Thessalonica (verse 29), and dragged them along with them.

In the theatre there was complete disorder, some shouting one thing and some another. Luke adds, almost humorously, that most of the people did not know why they were there (verse 32). The riot went on for another two hours and at last the city clerk intervened to quieten the crowd. It is interesting to note that three times in this vivid chapter the word *ekklesia* (normally translated 'church') occurs describing the assembly (verses 32, 39, and 41).

So far Paul had escaped, but he wanted to face the unruly crowd in person. The Ephesian believers, however, prevented him from doing this as they felt it was far too dangerous. The chief citizens of Ephesus, called Asiarchs, sent a message also urging Paul not to take such a risk, which shows that though they were Roman officials, they were not hostile to Christianity.

One of the crowd named Alexander tried to make himself heard, but, when they found he was a Jew, they shouted him down and for two hours they kept on crying, 'great is Artemis of the Ephesians'.

The city clerk obviously felt that unless the uproar soon ceased it would reach the ears of the Roman government and then there would be serious trouble, because Rome would not tolerate such violent behaviour. He was the most important Ephesian official and would be held responsible for the riot, hence his efforts to calm the situation. He evidently at last succeeded in being heard and verses 35-41 give a summary of what he said to the

crowd. He told them plainly that their behaviour would only cause trouble for themselves and could not solve their problems. If they did not stop they would only regret it later on. They should make their complaint in the proper manner by bringing it before the court of the provincial governor. Rome would not tolerate such disorderly proceedings and could only penalise the city for acting in this way.

These words apparently calmed the people and he dismissed them, and so the uproar ended and the danger passed.

CHAPTER TWENTY

'When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said goodbye and set out for Macedonia. ²He travelled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece, ³where he stayed three months. Because the Jews made a plot against him just as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia. ⁴He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy also, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia. ⁵These men went on ahead and waited for us at Troas. ⁶But we sailed from Philippi after the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and five days later joined the others at Troas, where we stayed seven days.' (Acts 20:1-6).

Soon after this upset, Paul sent for the disciples and after encouraging them, he said goodbye and set out for Macedonia. This was according to the plan in 19:21. All the while he encouraged the people he met on the journey and finally arrived in Greece, where he stayed three months.

It was during this time that he wrote the basic letter to the Romans, in which he informed them of a visit he hoped to pay to Rome soon, on his way to Spain. He also completed the arrangements for conveying the money gift from the churches in this region to Jerusalem for the impoverished believers there. He managed to hear of a plot the Jews had made against him, so instead of sailing for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia. He took with him seven believers. They were from the Roman provinces that shared in the collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem. In this number three were from Macedonia, Sopater of Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus of Thessalonica; two from Galatia, Gaius of Derbe and

Timothy of Lystra; two from Asia, Tychicus, and Trophimus.

There is no mention of any one from Corinth, but possibly the Corinthian contribution was entrusted to Titus and two other brethren sent by Paul to Corinth to receive it. It is strange that there is no mention, in the Acts of the Apostles, of Titus, this trusted colleague of Paul. Sir William Ramsay's explanation is probably the true one, that Titus was Luke's brother (*St. Paul the Traveller* pp 38, 390), and that when the 'we' narrative is resumed in verse five, Titus as well as Luke himself is included. The others crossed the Aegean ahead of Paul and waited for him at Troas (verse 6).

Paul remained at Philippi with Luke ('we' section) until after the week of Unleavened Bread. Then they set sail and joined the others.

⁷On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. ⁸There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. ⁹Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third storey and was picked up dead. ¹⁰Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "He's alive!" ¹¹Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left. ¹²The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted.' (Acts 20:7-12).

The journey to Jerusalem which followed was a critical one for the apostle Paul and is given in detail by Luke. The chapter begins by Luke recording the fact that Paul and his fellow-travellers met with the believers at Troas for worship and fellowship on the 'first day of the week'. This is the first time we have services mentioned on this day. There has been argument as to the real meaning of the phrase 'the first of the sabbaths' (literal translation of the

Greek of Acts 20:7), some taking the view that this means the first day for reckoning their seven sabbaths or weeks to Pentecost (Deut. 16:9). It is not possible to prove either view, but certainly the practice of meeting on what we term Sunday began at an early date. What should be noted is that in Scripture the sabbath is always the seventh day (for its typical meaning see Hebrews 4) and there is no divine command in the New Testament to any church to substitute the first day of the week for the seventh day, nor is the first day of the week ever called the sabbath. On the other hand, the Lord definitely intended that one day a week should be free from labour and spent in worship, praise and spiritual fellowship. What we wish to point out here is that for all our beliefs and Christian practices we should have the clear teaching of Scripture underlying them. There has been much muddled thinking here, but there was no divine command to meet on Sunday and call it the sabbath. Paul could give very clear teaching on this matter and did so in Romans 14:5-13. In verse 5 he says, 'One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind'. He could not have written this if God had ruled that Sunday must be regarded as the sabbath. What he does do is to warn those who hold either view not to use it as a means of criticising one another, for in the end, there is God's judgment seat to face and His displeasure with anyone who puts stumbling blocks in another's way (verse 13). Colossians 2:16,17 gives similar teaching on this subject. Let us hold fast to our Sunday of rest and worship, but not use wrong Scriptural names for it.

The phrase 'the breaking of bread' also needs care. It is wrong to assume that it always refers to the Lord's supper. It was a normal way of referring to a meal, for the Jewish flat cakes of bread were hard and needed breaking to be eaten. See Acts 27:33-36 for an example of this. But in 20:7 it probably denotes the fellowship meal which they ate together, this being followed by the Lord's supper. Paul followed this with an address, and it was a long one for

Luke tells us that it went on until midnight. The atmosphere, with the smoking torches, became heavy and a young man named Eutychus, who was sitting in a window, became drowsy and sank into a deep sleep. He then fell from the window, which was three storeys high, and was picked up dead. This is not the first time that the Bible records such an incident for 2 Kings 1:2 states that Ahaziah fell down through a 'lattice in his upper room'. Some expositors think that the young man only fainted, but Luke was a doctor and is not likely to have made a mistake here. Furthermore, verse 12 says 'the people took the young man home *alive*', and these words are pointless unless he had been dead. The word translated dead is *nekros*, which is used 18 times in the Acts, always referring to actual death. The words of the apostle, 'his life is in him' (verse 10), do not contradict this, as his life returned when Paul embraced him in the manner of Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17:21; 2 Kings 4:34).

At daybreak the ship was due to leave for Assos and all the party went on board excepting Paul, who had chosen to go by land on his own. Possibly he felt the need to be alone for a while, but he joined his friends at Assos.

¹³We went on ahead to the ship and sailed for Assos, where we were going to take Paul aboard. He had made this arrangement because he was going there on foot. ¹⁴When he met us at Assos, we took him aboard and went on to Mitylene. ¹⁵The next day we set sail from there and arrived off Kios. The day after that we crossed over to Samos, and on the following day arrived at Miletus. ¹⁶Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in the province of Asia, for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost.' (Acts 20:13-16).

They sailed from there and arrived off Kios; the day after that they crossed over to Samos and the next day they arrived at Miletus (verses 15,16). Paul avoided going to Ephesus for, Luke tells us, he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible by the day of Pentecost.

¹⁷From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. ¹⁸When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. ¹⁹I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. ²⁰You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. ²¹I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

²²"And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. ²³I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. ²⁴However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me — the task of testifying to the Gospel of God's grace.

²⁵"Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. ²⁶Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. ²⁷For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. ²⁸Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood. ²⁹I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. ³⁰Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. ³¹So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

³²"Now I commit you to God and to the word of His grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. ³⁵In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must

help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus Himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

³⁶When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. ³⁷They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. ³⁸What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.' (Acts 20:17-38).

While the ship stayed at Miletus, Paul sent a message to the elders of the church at Ephesus, asking them to come and see him. Ephesus was about 30 miles away. The apostle wanted to strengthen and encourage them, and the speech that follows shows how much he cared for them and they for him. It is unique for it is the only address to believers in the churches that Luke has recorded. Those who listened were elders (not apostles), and deacons, the two classes of officers in the early churches. The elders were also called 'overseers' (bishops A.V.), both terms describing the same office (see Titus 1:5,7). Later on, at the beginning of the second century, Ignatius shows us how the office of a bishop was given added importance and considered separately from an elder, but this was not so in Paul's lifetime. The Lord Jesus Himself is called 'the Shepherd and Overseer (Bishop A.V.) of your souls' (1 Pet. 2:25). The apostle, who (apart from the Lord Jesus) was the greatest preacher of the ages, gives this remarkable address to the Ephesian leaders and preachers. It is full of characteristic Pauline words, phrases and ideas which can be found in his epistles, such as *testify*, *course* (race), *pure*, *take heed*, *presbyter*, *bishop*, *acquire*, *apparel*, and possibly Luke took shorthand notes of the address. He has recorded the apostle speaking to the Jews in Pisidian Antioch, to the uneducated pagans at Lystra, to the cultured Greeks in Athens, and presently we shall hear him plead with the Jewish mob in Jerusalem, to the Roman Governor, Felix, in Caesarea, to the Jewish king Agrippa 2, and, last of all to the Jews in Rome.

There seemed to be a special bond between Paul and the Ephesian church, for he had been with them for three years

and had so many varied experiences and persecutions there. He would not see them again (verses 25,38) and the outlook and attitude is like the farewell discourse of the Lord Jesus to the disciples in the upper room (John 13-17). He warns them of perils just as the Lord had done and was taking stock of his ministry at the close of the third missionary tour. It was a speech that every believer today should carefully consider and receive guidance from.

The apostle speaks first of his own personal integrity. In spite of all his suffering and difficulties he had fully served the Lord with lowliness of mind and done all he could to help them. Doubtless he was aware of the old stratagem of Satan which denigrated the messenger so that no one would believe his message. He certainly did not do it to advertise his sufferings for Christ, but he had been warned by Christ from the very beginning that trouble and suffering would be his lot in the future (Acts 9:15,16), and in the present speech he states that the Holy Spirit had forewarned him that prison and hardships lay ahead (20:23). But this did not overwhelm him. He was prepared to give his life for the Lord if it was necessary. His one aim was to complete the work and witness the Lord Jesus had given him to pass on to others (verses 22-24).

Paul stated two things which are the hall-mark of faithful Christian service and which should be noted by every servant of God. In verse 27 he says that he had not hesitated to proclaim to the Ephesian believers *all the fulness of the truth* Christ had given him. He had '*kept back nothing* that was profitable' to them (verse 20 A.V.) but had declared to them '*all the counsel of God*' (verse 27 A.V.), not *some* of it, keeping as private belief truth that would offend.

This being so, Paul must have made known the revelation he was yet to write in Ephesians 3:1-11 concerning the creation of the 'new man' (Eph. 2:13-16) which he declared to be a Secret (Mystery) hidden by God

in Himself and therefore utterly unknown in past time (Eph. 3:5,9).

But, if we carefully search the epistles he had already written, we shall find that not once did he use this word 'mystery' concerning the churches that his faithful witness had formed. Later in the Acts he was to tell us the bounds of the truth he had given by words and by his letters. To Agrippa he declared '... and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying *nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen* — that the Christ would suffer, and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to His own people and to the Gentiles'. In other words Paul kept his doctrine to the earthly kingdom spoken of 'by all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after', (Acts 3:24), this kingdom being the Messianic kingdom on earth made known throughout the Old Testament. We shall search that part of Scripture in vain for the phase of the kingdom of God which is linked with blessing *in the heavenly places where Christ is now enthroned with the Father* (Eph. 2:4-6).

Like the reliable watchman of Ezekiel 33:1-6, Paul had sounded the truth so loudly that all in the province of Asia had heard. If any ignored it, their blood would be upon their own heads. The apostle was free of responsibility for the judgment they would receive later on from the Lord.

The leaders at Ephesus were admonished to keep watch over themselves and the church of God which He bought with His own blood. Those who believe in the deity of Christ will have no problem here. Whose blood is it? 'If *tou theou* (Aleph B Vulg.) is correct, *and it is*, then Jesus is here called "God" who shed His own blood for the flock' (A.T. Robertson). Some expositors tell us that Paul did not call Jesus 'God'. But this is not true, for we have Romans 9:5; Colossians 2:9; and Titus 2:13 where he does that very thing, besides Colossians 1:15-20 and Philippians 2:5-11. There should be no doubt that Paul's attitude to Christ was to regard Him as God. He said 'for me to live is Christ'

(Phil. 1:21) and 'Christ is ALL' (Col. 3:11), two statements that could not refer to any lesser being than God.

Paul finishes by warning them that there would be enemies to the truth he was proclaiming, both outside and inside the Ephesian church. This he had stressed to them over and over again during his three years in Ephesus (verse 31). In Paul's last letter we find him reminding Timothy that *all in Asia had turned away from him* (2 Tim. 1:15).

There must have been a tremendous revolt and apostasy that included the church at Ephesus, so Paul was no false prophet. No wonder that the truth for today was so soon forgotten after the apostle's martyrdom and it has not been fully recovered since. The majority of Christendom today are ignorant of the fulness of truth revealed in Paul's epistles, especially the last ones, his prison letters. John is bidden by the risen Christ to reproach the believers at Ephesus *for having abandoned their first love and tolerated false apostles there*, although there was also a faithful remnant (Rev. 2:1-7, and the reader should also note 1 Tim. 1:19; 4:1; 2 Tim. 2:17,18; 3:1). Is it any wonder then that the history of Christendom as a whole is a melancholy one?

The last thing Paul does is to remind them to guard the people of God as well as the sacred trust of God's truth committed to them ('the good deposit' 2 Tim. 1:13,14), knowing there is coming the time when they must give account of this to Christ Himself! And they must perform this service without thought of material reward.

The apostle tells them to remember that he had worked for his living when he was among them. He was chargeable to no one, nor had he coveted anything that was not his own. The believers there should do likewise and support not only themselves, but also those who were weak physically. He finishes by quoting a saying of Christ unrecorded elsewhere, 'it is more blessed to give than to receive' (verse 35). This brings to our mind Luke 6:38:

‘Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap’.

Paul then knelt down and prayed with them. Those who valued the wonderful truth he had taught them wept as they embraced and kissed him. What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see him again.

It was indeed a moving moment at Ephesus.

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

'After we had torn ourselves away from them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Cos. The next day we went to Rhodes and from there to Patara. ²We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail. ³After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo. ⁴Finding the disciples there, we stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. ⁵But when our time was up, we left and continued on our way. All the disciples and their wives and children accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray. ⁶After saying good-bye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home.' (Acts 21:1-6).

From reading the previous address to the Ephesian elders we can see that Paul had an urge to reach Jerusalem, for he had the collection from the Gentile churches to give to the Jerusalem leaders for the poor saints there (20:22-24), and this was in accordance with the Holy Spirit's will. His missionary journeys were always under the leading of the Spirit. He had been 'separated' by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2) and had been sent forth by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:4), and sometimes the Spirit's guidance prevented him from taking a certain road (Acts 16:6,7). All had been decided for him by God and he was ready to go wherever the Lord showed him, whether it was difficult or not. His one object was to finish the race and complete the task God had given him (20:24). This was like the Lord Jesus when He said, 'My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to *finish His work*' (John 4:34 A.V.), and at the close of His ministry He said, '*I have finished the work* which Thou gavest Me to do' (John 17:4 A.V.).

Paul knew that trouble and imprisonment lay ahead, for the Holy Spirit had forewarned him of this, but he was

ready for it. We have now reached the last stages of the fateful journey to Jerusalem. From Miletus they took ship and sailed to Cos, one of the Dodecanese islands, and the next day they reached Rhodes. From there they went on to Patara and found a ship bound for Syria and Palestine. They then landed at Tyre. As this was a cross-sea voyage instead of a coasting voyage, the journey was shortened considerably. On the way they sighted Cyprus, and when they reached Tyre they had to take a week there while the ship unloaded. During this time they visited local believers, for there was a church at Tyre, and they had happy fellowship with them. Some who had the gift of prophecy foresaw the danger that awaited Paul at Jerusalem, so they tried to get him to change his plans and not go there. The apostle, however, knew the leading of the Lord and interpreted the words of the Spirit rather as a forecast not a prohibition, such as he received later on through Agabus (verses 10,11). It was natural that his friends should try to save him from suffering, but the apostle, like his Master, 'steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem' (Luke 9:51 A.V.). At the end of the week all the disciples at Tyre, with their families, accompanied Paul to the ship, where they knelt and prayed and bade farewell to each other, and then the ship continued the journey.

⁷We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for a day. ⁸Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. ⁹He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.

¹⁰After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

¹²When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³Then Paul

answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." ¹⁴When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done." (Acts 21:7-14).

They reached Ptolemais, about 30 miles south of Tyre. This is the modern Acre. They spent only a day there in which they contacted some of the brethren and then went on to Caesarea, which was the political capital of Judea under the Romans, where the procurators lived. It was an important city and had a magnificent harbour. This is now the third time that we have seen Paul in Caesarea, the other times being in Acts 9:30 and 18:22. Paul and his friends were looked after by Philip the evangelist. Philip was one of the seven officers appointed in the early days of the Jerusalem church to supervise help from the common fund for those in need. His evangelistic work followed the death of Stephen, in Samaria, Philistia, with his home at Caesarea. He was called Philip the evangelist to distinguish him from Philip the apostle, one of the Twelve.

Paul and his friends must have had an enjoyable and profitable time with Philip. Some twenty years had passed since the days of Stephen and there must have been much to discuss relating to the witness for the Lord during that time. Luke tells us that Philip had four unmarried daughters who had been given the Pentecostal gift of prophecy which related to proclaiming the truth, not necessarily dealing with the future, although this could be included.

The prophet Agabus from Judea joined them. Earlier on he had foretold the famine of A.D. 46 (Acts 11:28) and now he foretells Paul's arrest and imprisonment, very much as the Christians at Tyre had done, but he does not say that the apostle should not continue his journey to Jerusalem. Agabus adopted the manner of some Old Testament prophets and enforced his prophecy with dumb show. Zedekiah made horns of iron to illustrate his prophecy

(1 Kings 22:11). Isaiah walked 'naked and barefoot' as a sign that the Egyptians would be taken captive by Assyria (Isa. 20:2 A.V.).

Likewise Agabus foretold the imprisonment of Paul by tying himself up with Paul's girdle (verse 11). But the apostle, though moved by the weeping and concern of believers around him, told them once more that he must follow the path of obedience to the Lord, whatever the cost.

When they saw that his mind was firmly made up, they gave in, praying that the Lord's will might be done (verses 12-14).

¹⁵After this, we got ready and went up to Jerusalem.

¹⁶Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and brought us to the home of Mnason, where we were to stay. He was a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples.' (Acts 21:15,16).

The A.V. here reads 'we took up our carriages', which is old English for 'we packed up', and they continued on the last stage of their journey which was another 64 miles to Jerusalem. There they stayed at the home of Mnason, who came from Cyprus, and was one of the early members of the Jerusalem church.

¹⁷When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly. ¹⁸The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

²⁰When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. ²¹They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. ²²What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, ²³so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. ²⁴Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay

their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. ²⁵As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality."

²⁶The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the Temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.' (Acts 21:17-26).

They first of all received a welcome from the Jerusalem believers and quite a number of them must have been personal friends of Paul. The next day they visited James and all the elders were present. Nothing is said of Peter or John, who were probably away on missionary work. James was now obviously in charge of the witness at Jerusalem. To him and all the others Paul gave a detailed report of the wonderful work God had done through his ministry at Ephesus, Philippi, Galatia and elsewhere. For this they praised the Lord. But Paul had serious doubts concerning his reception at Jerusalem which he expressed when he wrote his letter to the Romans, for he asked them to pray that he might be delivered from unbelievers in Judea and that the money gift he was bringing might be 'accepted of the saints' (15:30,31 A.V.). He must have wondered whether his fears were beginning to be realised when the Jerusalem believers said to him :

'You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, *and all of them are zealous for the law*. They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles *to turn away from Moses*, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs' (21:20-21).

Such statements were not true.

So here was trouble again, and as always it was from his own nation. However, the believers had a plan of action

which they wanted Paul to carry out, as they felt this would remove the prejudice which some had against the apostle. There happened to be four of their number who had undertaken a Nazarite vow. They had evidently contracted ceremonial defilement and had to undergo a purificatory rite in the Temple which involved animal sacrifice, and cereal and drink-offerings which lasted a week. The apostle was advised to join with them in this and pay the expenses of their offering and then everyone would know there was no truth in the rumours that were circulating (verses 23,24).

The next day, Paul took their advice and purified himself with the others. He was carrying out the principle which he stated in 1 Corinthians 9:20, 'to the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law'. What he would not allow was the law of Moses being fastened on a Jew or Gentile *for salvation*.

The reader will note that from verse 18 the 'we' in the narrative is discontinued until 27:1, but this does not mean that Luke was absent from all the incidents that follow, but only that he did not participate in them.

²⁷When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the Temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, ²⁸shouting, "Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the Temple area and defiled this holy place." ²⁹(They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the Temple area.)

³⁰The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the Temple, and immediately the gates were shut. ³¹While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of

Jerusalem was in an uproar. ³²He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

³³The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he asked who he was and what he had done. ³⁴Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another, and since the commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. ³⁵When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great he had to be carried by the soldiers. ³⁶The crowd that followed kept shouting, "Away with him!" (Acts 21:27-36).

When some of Paul's enemies, Jews from Asia, saw him in the Temple precincts, they realised that their opportunity had come to seize him and murder him if possible. Note that they were not the Judaizers who had caused trouble, but the violent Jews who had hounded the apostle from place to place as we have seen previously. Some expositors think that Paul did a foolish thing to take the vow in the Temple, but, as we have pointed out, the troublers were not from the Judaizers; and the dangerous riot that occurred could have happened quite apart from this incident, but it was going to make him a prisoner for five years. Having seen Paul with Trophimus (a Gentile) in Jerusalem, and knowing also that Paul had been in the Temple court of Israel, finishing the ritual obligations in connection with the vow, they assumed that Paul had taken Trophimus with him into the Temple, which was reserved for Jews only. Any Gentile found there was liable for execution. Two notices giving this warning have been discovered by archaeologists. For a Jew, this was one of the most serious offences that would certainly stir up the whole city against Paul. The Asian Jewish opposers knew this to be true, and so they kept shouting that this had happened and that Paul had profaned their Temple.

Straight away there was a tumult and the crowd seized the apostle and dragged him from the inner precincts down the steps to the outer court. The Temple police, seeing the danger, closed the doors between the two courts to prevent the mob coming in any further. Paul, in the outer court, was being fiercely assaulted and beaten by the crowd and his life was saved only by the timely arrival of Roman soldiers from the fortress of Antonia, north west of the Temple and connected with it by two flights of steps. This was positioned so that they could intervene quickly if any riots occurred. They had evidently received a report that the trouble was spreading, so a detachment of soldiers was immediately sent by the tribune in charge, the number of which would have been 200 or more with their centurions. Running down the steps, they rescued Paul just in time from his Jewish enemies.

They arrested him and the commander ordered him to be handcuffed to two soldiers. Evidently he was thought to be a criminal, but they could not allow him to be lynched by the rioters. He must be dealt with legally. The commander could not find out what he was charged with because the crowd were all shouting different things and the uproar was too great to get any reliable details. So he ordered the soldiers to bring Paul into the fortress. The violence of the mob was so great that they had to carry him. Meanwhile they kept shouting and screaming, 'away with him!'.

³⁷As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander, "May I say something to you?"

"Do you speak Greek?" he replied. ³⁸"Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the desert some time ago?"

³⁹Paul answered, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people."

⁴⁰Having received the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they

were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic:' (Acts 21:37-40).

The military commander, guessing who Paul was, asked him if he was an Egyptian rebel who had started a previous revolt which involved 4,000 terrorists, and was very surprised when Paul addressed him in educated Greek and asked for permission to speak to the rioting crowd. The apostle assured him that he was not an Egyptian, but a citizen of the great university city of Tarsus and born of Jewish stock. The commander gave him permission to speak, and so Paul, at one of the most dangerous times of his life, bravely stood up and, relying solely on the Lord, began to speak to his enemies in Aramaic, which was not only the vernacular of the Jews of Palestine, but the common speech of non-Greek speakers of western Asia and in the east, beyond the Euphrates.

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

"Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defence."

²When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet.

Then Paul said: ³"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. ⁴I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, ⁵as also the high priest and all the Council can testify. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

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

⁸"Who are you, Lord?' I asked.

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

¹⁰"What shall I do, Lord?' I asked.

"Get up,' the Lord said, 'and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.' ¹¹My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

¹²A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. ¹³He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him.

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

¹⁷"When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the Temple, I fell into a trance ¹⁸and saw the Lord speaking. 'Quick!' He said to me. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.'

¹⁹"'Lord,' I replied, 'these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. ²⁰And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.'

²¹"Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"' (Acts 22:1-21).

The fact that Paul addressed the rebellious crowd in their own language, Aramaic, had a quietening effect on them and they listened to what he had to say. He began by describing his upbringing as an orthodox Jew, his conversion at Damascus and his commission to evangelize the Gentile world. This is the second time we have an account of the apostle's conversion, the first having been made by Luke (chapter 9). He points out that he was born and bred at Tarsus, and then, under Gamaliel, he was thoroughly trained in the law of Moses. He declares that he was just as zealous for God as any who were listening to him, so much so that he persecuted the followers of 'the Way' because he thought the new Christian ideas set God's teaching aside. He stopped at nothing, arresting men and women and throwing them into prison, with death to follow. He was going to Damascus to seize these followers of the Christian creed and bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment, when suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around him and he heard a heavenly voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? I am Jesus

of Nazareth, Whom you are persecuting' and in reply, the apostle could only say, 'who are you, Lord?', and 'what shall I do, Lord?'

The Lord answered by telling him to go into Damascus and there he would learn what to do. He had to be led there, because the brilliance of the light had blinded him.

Paul then describes his meeting with Ananias, whom he describes as a 'devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there'. From him he received his sight back again and was told that he had seen the risen Christ and heard His words, appointing him to be a witness of all he had seen and heard and instructing him to be baptised.

Paul adds words that are not given in chapter nine, to the effect that later on he was praying in the Temple, and the Lord appeared to him again, warning him to leave Jerusalem at once, because his testimony about Christ would be rejected. Paul started to remonstrate and say that everyone knew his former antipathy to Christ, and the part he had played in the stoning of Stephen and this would convince them that his change of attitude was based on the strongest grounds. But the Lord insisted that the apostle should leave at once, for now his sphere of witness would be the Gentile world far away.

Up to this point the crowd listened to the apostle, but directly he spoke of his mission to the Gentiles, all their opposition blazed up again, which only shows how much they hated them. But we remember that Paul had reminded the opposing Jews at Corinth that they had been chosen by God '*to be a light of the Gentiles*' and they should be '*for salvation unto the ends of the earth!*' (13:47 A.V.). Is it to be wondered at that this nation was slipping farther and farther into the darkness of unbelief such that finally it would end in their rejection by God (Acts 28)?

²²The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!"

²³As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, ²⁴the commander ordered Paul to be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and questioned in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this. ²⁵As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?"

²⁶When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. "What are you going to do?" he asked. "This man is a Roman citizen."

²⁷The commander went to Paul and asked, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?"

"Yes, I am," he answered.

²⁸Then the commander said, "I had to pay a big price for my citizenship."

"But I was born a citizen," Paul replied.

²⁹Those who were about to question him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realised that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.' (Acts 22:22-29).

The opposers got more and more excited, throwing dust about and waving their clothes.

The Roman military officer evidently despaired of getting to the bottom of the trouble, so he ordered Paul to be taken into the barracks and to be scourged in order to get the truth from him. This was a shocking experience which often led to the death of the victim. Paul states in 2 Corinthians 11:24,25 that he had been beaten with rods three times by the Romans and five times he had received the lash inflicted by Jewish authority. It is quite amazing how the apostle's body survived such treatment, but he had

an almighty Saviour and Lord, Who preserved him until his work for God was finished.

As they were tying him up to receive the terrible scourging, Paul asked the centurion in command, 'is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?' (verse 25).

Directly the centurion heard this, he reported it to the commander. 'What are you going to do?' he said. 'This man is a Roman citizen'. The commander went straight away to Paul and said, 'are you a Roman citizen?' Paul replied, 'yes, I am'. The officer, evidently trying to impress the apostle, said, 'I had to pay a big price for my citizenship'. The sale of Roman citizenship was a fact. It was resorted to by emperors as a means of filling the exchequer. But Paul replied with simple and calm dignity, 'I was *born a citizen*'. This statement filled the commander with alarm, for it was illegal to treat any Roman citizen in this way and he knew he could be severely punished by his superiors for doing so.

He was now forced to ascertain from a legal standpoint what had caused this dangerous disturbance, so the next day he ordered the Jewish Sanhedrin to hold a meeting and he brought Paul before them.

³⁰The next day, since the commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them.' (Acts 22:30).

If the charge against Paul was a breach of Jewish law, then the Sanhedrin must try him.

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

¹Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day." ²At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. ³Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!"

⁴Those who were standing near Paul said, "You dare to insult God's high priest?"

⁵Paul replied, "Brothers, I did not realise that he was the high priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.'"

⁶Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead." ⁷When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. ⁸(The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.)

⁹There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. "We find nothing wrong with this man," they said. "What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?" ¹⁰The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks.' (Acts 23:1-10).

Having been brought before the Jewish court, the apostle took the initiative of addressing that body in his defence. He could say truly that in the past he had lived in all good conscience in the sight of God, just as he wrote

later on to the Philippians, as touching the righteousness which is in the law, he was blameless. He did not say sinless, but he walked in conformity to God's commands. A little later on he assured the procurator Felix that it was his constant desire to maintain a clear conscience before God and man (24:16).

But he could not pursue this line any further because the high priest Ananias, intensely annoyed with Paul's claim, told those standing by to strike him across the mouth. This was illegal and particularly offensive to a Jew at the hands of another Jew. This high priest was nominated so by Herod, king of Cholsis, who was a brother of Herod Agrippa 1. He was one of the worst high priests who profaned the sacred office. Josephus tells us that he robbed the ordinary priests by stealing their tithes. The Talmud describes him as rapacious, gluttonous and greedy. To be judged by a hypocrite like this must have been exceedingly trying to Paul and we can understand how his patience gave way when he replied, 'God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!' The word 'whitewashed' is the same as the Lord Jesus used in describing the hypocritical Pharisees of his day as 'whited sepulchres' (Matt. 23:27 A.V.)

Actually, what Paul said of Ananias was prophetic, for he died an ignominious death at the hands of assassins and it was true of his lack of character, yet the apostle admitted that he had been guilty of irreverence against the office of high priest (verse 5). The Lord Jesus, when smitten on the cheek, did not threaten (1 Pet. 2:23), but He did protest against the act. Paul had not yet been properly charged, let alone tried and found guilty.

Let those who criticise Paul here, consider what they would have done in similar circumstances. We should all remember his advice in Galatians 6:1 'considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted'.

Not only has the apostle critics of his attitude to the high priest, but they do not hesitate to criticise his next step in his defence when he stated that he was on trial because of his hope in the resurrection of the dead (verse 6), knowing that Pharisees and Sadducees were completely divided on this fundamental issue. The Sadducees rejected resurrection and the reality of angels and spirits, whereas the Pharisees firmly believed both these doctrines, and this was the chief difference between them.

But resurrection was the very centre of Paul's doctrine and the gospel, as 1 Corinthians 15:3,4, shows. Without it there is no foundation for the Christian faith, and salvation is a mockery (1 Cor. 15:13-19). The Messianic hope was absolutely bound up with the doctrine of resurrection. This shows it was not a mere trick of Paul's to divide the Sanhedrin, as some maintain, but it certainly did this very thing (verse 9,10) and was bound to do so.

Again there was an uproar, and the dispute became so violent that the commander, to save Paul's life, ordered the troops to go down and take Paul away by force and bring him into the barracks.

¹¹The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about Me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."

¹²The next morning the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. ¹³More than forty men were involved in this plot. ¹⁴They went to the chief priests and elders and said, "We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul. ¹⁵Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here."

¹⁶But when the son of Paul's sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul.

¹⁷Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, "Take this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him." ¹⁸So he took him to the commander.

The centurion said, "Paul, the prisoner, sent for me and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you."

¹⁹The commander took the young man by the hand, drew him aside and asked, "What is it you want to tell me?"

²⁰He said: "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul before the Sanhedrin tomorrow on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about him. ²¹Don't give in to them, because more than forty of them are waiting in ambush for him. They have taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are ready now, waiting for your consent to their request."

²²The commander dismissed the young man and cautioned him, "Don't tell anyone that you have reported this to me."

²³Then he called two of his centurions and ordered them, "Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. ²⁴Provide mounts for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix." (Acts 23:11-24).

Paul must have felt that his previous fears of what might happen if he went to Jerusalem were real and were being fulfilled. This must have been a time when he needed encouragement and strength and this he received by another appearance of the Lord to him just as he had done at critical times before. For the Lord then said to him:

'Take courage! As you have testified about Me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome' (verse 11).

This must have greatly cheered him, for it showed without doubt that he had done the right thing in coming to Jerusalem, although that would be accompanied by severe

trial and persecution. Furthermore he would finally reach Rome, which he had planned to do on his way to Spain (Rom. 15:28,29), though it was to be in a way that he never contemplated.

Luke goes on to record the extreme fanaticism of Paul's enemies. Their one aim was to kill Paul and so get rid of him. Until now their plans had failed. More than 40 of them plotted together, having taken an oath not to eat anything until they had murdered the apostle. They made known their plan to the chief priests and elders, which was for them to ask the Roman authorities to bring Paul before them once more on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about him. The assassins were then ready to kill him before the enquiry began (verses 12-15). But God's almighty power was working to protect His servant. We are not told how, but Paul's nephew got to know of the plot, and he told Paul about it straight away. Paul immediately called a centurion and told him to take the young fellow to the commander and, when the officer heard of the planned assassination, he took instant steps to thwart it, for it was obvious that Paul was not safe in Jerusalem. It would be better to send him under a strong guard to Caesarea and there he would be under the responsibility of the procurator of Judea. So he commanded two centurions to get ready a strong guard of infantry, cavalry and armed troops. Horses were to be provided for Paul so that the 60 to 70 miles to Caesarea could be covered as quickly as possible.

²⁵He wrote a letter as follows:

²⁶Claudius Lysias,

To His Excellency, Governor Felix:

Greetings.

²⁷This man was seized by the Jews and they were about to kill him, but I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen. ²⁸I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I

brought him to their Sanhedrin. ²⁹I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their law, but there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment. ³⁰When I was informed of a plot to be carried out against the man, I sent him to you at once. I also ordered his accusers to present to you their case against him.

³¹So the soldiers, carrying out their orders, took Paul with them during the night and brought him as far as Antipatris. ³²The next day they let the cavalry go on with him, while they returned to the barracks. ³³When the cavalry arrived in Caesarea, they delivered the letter to the governor and handed Paul over to him. ³⁴The governor read the letter and asked what province he was from. Learning that he was from Cilicia, ³⁵he said, "I will hear your case when your accusers get here." Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod's palace.' (Acts 23:25-35).

In addition the Roman commander sent a letter to Felix the Governor (verses 25-30) explaining the situation. It was cleverly written to put himself in a good light with Felix, his superior officer. He reversed the order of events by saying that, on learning that he was a Roman citizen, he rescued him. Actually the facts were the other way round, and of course he said nothing about his order to scourge Paul, for this would have immediately put him in the wrong, but he actually posed as a protector of a fellow Roman citizen. However, to his credit, he inferred that Paul should have been freed, for there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment.

Each magistrate before whom Paul appeared declared him innocent. Gallio, Lysias the commander, Felix and Festus. What happened to the 40 conspirators we do not know. No more is heard of them during the long five years of Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea and Rome.

The letter sent to Felix was 'after this manner' (A.V.), which shows that Luke does not reproduce it *verbatim*, but gives the general purport of it.

The soldiers, carrying out their orders, took Paul with them during the night as far as Antipatris. The next day the cavalry took him on to Caesarea, delivered the letter to Felix, and handed Paul over to him. Felix asked Paul which province he came from. On hearing he was from Cilicia, a Roman province, he decided he could deal with the case himself and told Paul he would hold a full hearing when his accusers arrived.

Antonius Felix was procurator of Judea from A.D. 52-59. He was a slave who had advanced to a post of honour by reason of the influence his brother Pallas exercised at the imperial court under Claudius. His term of office was beset by many troubles and uprisings which he mercilessly put down, thus making himself an enemy of the moderate Jews.

Tacitus sums him up by saying, 'he exercised the power of a king with the mind of a slave', hardly a compliment! He ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod's palace.

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

‘Five days later the high priest Ananias went down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor. ²When Paul was called in, Tertullus presented his case before Felix: "We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation. ³Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude. ⁴But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly.

⁵"We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect ⁶and even tried to desecrate the Temple; so we seized him. ⁸By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him."

⁹The Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were true.’ (Acts 24:1-9).

Five days later, a number from the Sanhedrin, led by the high priest, came to Caesarea to state their case against Paul. They brought a Roman lawyer with them, named Tertullus, and this was necessary since the Jews were not familiar with Roman legal procedure and it was the custom to do so in the provinces. The lawyer commenced with an attempt at flattery in order to ingratiate himself into the good grace of the governor, Felix. What he said was far from truth, but it sounded well to praise Felix for keeping peace in the province, especially as Tertullus was going to accuse Paul of being a disturber of the peace. We doubtless have only a summary of the speech Tertullus made, but enough is given to make clear its import.

Three charges were brought against Paul:

- (1) He was a public pest, and promoter of sedition among all the Jews throughout the empire.
- (2) He was a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.
- (3) He had attempted to profane the Temple.

This implied that the apostle had offended against both Roman and Jewish law. The word translated 'pest' means a plague. As A.T. Robertson says, 'think of the greatest preacher of the ages being branded as a pest by a contemporary hired lawyer'! Needless to say, these charges were complete misrepresentations and the third one a lie.

¹⁰When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied: "I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so I gladly make my defence. ¹¹You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. ¹²My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the Temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. ¹³And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. ¹⁴However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, ¹⁵and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. ¹⁶So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

¹⁷After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. ¹⁸I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the Temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance. ¹⁹But there are some Jews from the province of Asia, who ought to be here before you and bring charges if they have anything against me. ²⁰Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin — ²¹unless it was this one thing I shouted as I stood in their presence: 'It is concerning the resurrection

of the dead that I am on trial before you today.'" (Acts 24:10-21).

Paul is now invited to state his case. He begins with a complimentary statement, which in this case was true, and then says that no more than twelve days ago he went up to Jerusalem to worship. The days are made up as follows:

- 1st day — Arrival at Jerusalem (21:15-17).
- 2nd day — Interview with James etc (21:18,19).
- 3rd day — Purification in the Temple (21:26).
- 7th day — The 7 days nearly completed and Paul arrested (21:30).
- 8th day — Before the Sanhedrin (22:30).
- 9th day — Conspiracy revealed (23:12).
- 10th day — Arrival at Caesarea (23:33).
- 11th day and 12th day — In custody (23:35).
- 13th day — Trial before Felix (24:1).

The apostle went on to show that he had done nothing to draw a crowd or cause a riotous assembly because he had been in no disputation with anyone in the city, Temple or synagogues and therefore there was not one charge they could substantiate.

But he did worship the God of Israel and he believed whole-heartedly in the Old Testament Scriptures, whether the law or the prophets, and he held to the hope of resurrection.

He makes clear that there would be a resurrection of two classes, the just (those justified by faith as his letter to the Romans declared) and the unjust (the unrighteous who knew nothing of such justification). What it does not do is to teach that both classes refer to believers, those who walk in the spirit and those who walk in the flesh. This is quite contrary to the usage of the words 'righteous' and 'unrighteous', here and in Romans. No believer, whatever his day-by-day walk, is ever termed 'unrighteous', but rather he is called 'carnal' if he is walking after the old sinful nature, the flesh. In Romans and Galatians 'flesh'

and 'spirit' are the two opposites relating to believers. Paul finished by pointing out that the Asian Jews who had accused him were not present, and if there had been any truth in their accusations they should have been there as his prosecutors. The only disagreement they could have pointed out was concerning the resurrection, and that was certainly not a crime.

²²Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. "When Lysias the commander comes," he said, "I will decide your case."
²³He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs.

²⁴Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁵As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, "That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you." ²⁶At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him.

²⁷When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favour to the Jews, he left Paul in prison.' (Acts 24:22-27).

Evidently Felix could see that Paul was innocent of the charges made against him, but the attitude of Felix was that he had had so much trouble with the Jews that he did not want to offend them further. Felix had some knowledge of Christianity at this time (probably helped by his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess), so that as Paul spoke about faith in Christ Jesus, and touched on righteousness, self-control and judgment to come, he trembled with fear and quickly ended the conversation. However, he hoped that Paul would give him a bribe, so he later sent for him on several occasions, and this went on for two years, after which he was succeeded by Porcius Festus. But he left

Paul in prison, partly out of pique and partly because he still wanted to please the Jews (verses 24-27).

Perhaps we should note in passing that the wife of Felix came from a terrible family. She was one of the three daughters of Herod Agrippa 1. Her father murdered James, her great-uncle, Herod Antipas, slew John the Baptist, her great-grandfather, Herod the Great, killed the babes of Bethlehem. What a record!

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

¹Three days after arriving in the province, Festus went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem, ²where the chief priests and Jewish leaders appeared before him and presented the charges against Paul. ³They urgently requested Festus, as a favour to them, to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem, for they were preparing an ambush to kill him along the way. ⁴Festus answered, "Paul is being held at Caesarea, and I myself am going there soon. ⁵Let some of your leaders come with me and press charges against the man there, if he has done anything wrong."⁵ (Acts 25:1-5).

Three days after his arrival in Caesarea, Festus went to Jerusalem to meet the Sanhedrin and other leading Jews, which was a normal thing for a new procurator to do.

The Jewish enemies of Paul in Jerusalem must have been delighted to learn that Felix had left Paul imprisoned at Caesarea. They now hoped that Festus would favour them by sending orders to Caesarea to bring Paul up to Jerusalem, and on the way they would make another attempt to assassinate him.

Festus, however, saw no need for this, and undoubtedly the Lord was over-ruling. He decided that, as he was shortly going back to Caesarea, a responsible deputation from the Jewish rulers could accompany him, and they could accuse Paul before him there.

⁶After spending eight or ten days with them, he went down to Caesarea, and the next day he convened the court and ordered that Paul be brought before him. ⁷When Paul appeared, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many serious charges against him, which they could not prove.

⁸Then Paul made his defence: "I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the Temple or against Caesar."

⁹Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favour, said to Paul, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?"

¹⁰Paul answered: "I am now standing before Caesar's court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. ¹¹If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no-one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!"

¹²After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: "You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!" (Acts 25:6-12).

This meant that the case against the apostle would be opened yet again, which could never have happened if Felix had done his duty in acquitting and discharging him.

After a week in Jerusalem, Festus returned to Caesarea with the deputation from the Sanhedrin. The next day he ordered Paul to be brought into court and, taking his seat as judge, gave the Jews the opportunity of restating their charges against him. This they did and, although there were many, not one of them could be proved.

Paul replied that he had done nothing wrong against the Jews, the Temple, or Caesar. But Festus, taking the same attitude as Felix, wanted to please the Jews, and so he asked Paul if he was prepared to go to Jerusalem and stand trial before him there.

However reasonable this appeared on the surface, Paul would have none of it. Why should he place himself in jeopardy once again? If Festus began his rule by trying to pacify these Jews, he might make further concessions to them which could be even more dangerous. There was one way open to Paul, as a Roman citizen, to free himself from this difficult situation. Let Roman justice decide.

As a Roman citizen he could appeal against the verdict of a lower court and exercise his right of appeal to Caesar

and the sovereign court at Rome. Doubtless Festus heard Paul's decision with some relief — for he was in a difficult position also. He would be relieved of this problem if Paul went to Rome, so he answered Paul and said 'To Caesar you will go!'

¹³A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus. ¹⁴Since they were spending many days there, Festus discussed Paul's case with the king. He said: "There is a man here whom Felix left as a prisoner. ¹⁵When I went to Jerusalem, the chief priests and elders of the Jews brought charges against him and asked that he be condemned.

¹⁶"I told them that it is not the Roman custom to hand over any man before he has faced his accusers and has had an opportunity to defend himself against their charges. ¹⁷When they came here with me, I did not delay the case, but convened the court the next day and ordered the man to be brought in. ¹⁸When his accusers got up to speak, they did not charge him with any of the crimes I had expected. ¹⁹Instead, they had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus whom Paul claimed was alive. ²⁰I was at a loss how to investigate such matters; so I asked if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial there on these charges. ²¹When Paul made his appeal to be held over for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to Caesar."

²²Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I would like to hear this man myself."

He replied, "Tomorrow you will hear him." (Acts 25:13-22).

Fortunately for Festus, another turn of events helped him. North east of his province was a kingdom ruled by Herod Agrippa 2. He was the son of Herod Agrippa 1, King of Judea from A.D. 41-44 (see 12:1). He received a small kingdom between Lebanon and Antilebanon in succession to his uncle. In A.D. 53 he gave up this kingdom in exchange for a larger one and this was

augmented three years later by Nero, who added to it a number of cities and villages around the Lake of Galilee.

Herod Agrippa 2 was at this time in Palestine paying his respects to the new imperial representative, Festus, whose jurisdiction was over the province adjoining his kingdom.

This Agrippa the younger had the reputation of being an authority on Judaism, and so Festus decided that Agrippa could help him make the report on Paul which would have to accompany Paul's appeal to the emperor.

Accordingly he took the opportunity of acquainting Agrippa with what had happened regarding Paul, whom Felix had left in prison. The priests and elders of the Jews had brought charges against him and wanted Festus to condemn him. Festus had told them that according to Roman custom the person who was being charged must have the opportunity to defend himself. The next day, when Paul was brought in, they disputed with him about their religion and about a man named Jesus, Who Paul claimed was alive. Festus had asked him to agree to being tried at Jerusalem, but Paul had refused and made his appeal to the Emperor; so he was held until he could be sent to Caesar.

Agrippa answered Festus and said, 'I would like to hear this man myself'. Festus told him that he could do so the next day.

²³The next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the audience room with the high ranking officers and the leading men of the city. At the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. ²⁴Festus said: "King Agrippa, and all who are present with us, you see this man! The whole Jewish community has petitioned me about him in Jerusalem and here in Caesarea, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. ²⁵I found he had done nothing deserving of death, but because he made his appeal to the Emperor I decided to send him to Rome. ²⁶But I have nothing definite to write to His Majesty about him. Therefore I have brought him before

all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that as a result of this investigation I may have something to write. ²⁷For I think it is unreasonable to send on a prisoner without specifying the charges against him." (Acts 25:23-27).

The next day Agrippa and his sister came together with the procurator's staff and the leading citizens of Caesarea. Paul was then brought in and Festus told them he could find no substance in the capital charges his enemies had brought against him, but he would appreciate the co-operation of Agrippa in the matter of the report he must send to Rome. He therefore handed over Paul's case to the king. This was not a trial but an examination to help Festus out of a difficulty.

CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

"Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself."

So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defence: ²"King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defence against all the accusations of the Jews, ³and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you listen to me patiently.

⁴"The Jews all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem. ⁵They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee. ⁶And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers that I am on trial today. ⁷This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. O King, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me. ⁸Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?

⁹"I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the Name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. ¹¹Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.

¹²"On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. ¹³About noon, O King, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. ¹⁴We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why

do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

¹⁵"Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?'

"I am Jesus, Whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. ¹⁶"Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of Me and what I will show you. ¹⁷I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them ¹⁸to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'

¹⁹"So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. ²⁰First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. ²¹That is why the Jews seized me in the Temple courts and tried to kill me. ²²But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen — ²³that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to His own people and to the Gentiles.'" (Acts 26:1-23).

Paul's defence before Agrippa is the fullest of which we have any record. He was no longer on trial and he availed himself of this opportunity of witnessing for Christ and giving a complete account of what had happened. In Acts 9:15 the Lord had told Ananias that Paul would bear His Name before Gentiles, kings and the people of Israel. So now Paul gives his testimony before king Agrippa. It was a masterpiece of witness concerning his Lord and the part he had played up to this point. He told Agrippa that he was glad to make his defence before him because he was an authority on Jewish customs and controversies, and this was an undoubted fact.

The apostle begins by going over the ground already covered by Acts 9 and 22 — his early life, his persecuting zeal, and the vision of the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus. At verse 16, he breaks new ground. Truth hitherto unrecorded is now revealed and this is of vital importance to us to give us an understanding of the purpose of God that was about to unfold.

We are told here for the first time what the Lord Himself said to Paul on the road to Damascus. This may be questioned, but if we turn to Acts 9 we find there in verses 1 and 2 a record of the journey to Damascus. Verses 3 and 4 record the vision and the voice. Verse 5 reveals that it is the Lord Who speaks. Verse 6 tells Paul to go into the city and wait for instruction. Verses 15 & 16 record *what the Lord said to Ananias about Paul*, but that is all.

It is clear that all that Christ said to Paul is not recorded in Acts 9 and this is also true of Acts 22. This chapter records the words of Ananias (verses 13-15), and we learn that Paul was to be a witness of all he had seen and heard. But it is to Acts 26 that we must turn to discover for the first time what the Lord Jesus actually said to Paul at his conversion and commission. We give verses 15-18 in the A.V. :

‘... I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness *both* of these things which thou hast seen, and of *those things in the which I will appear unto thee*; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me’.

‘Both’ surely speaks of two things: his present ministry to which he refers again in verses 19-23, and a future appearing of the Lord in which Paul would be sent to the Gentiles, to turn them from darkness to light, and to deliver

them from the blinding power of Satan, so that they might receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among the sanctified ones. Christ had already revealed to him that imprisonment awaited him (20:23).

And this is exactly what happened. He became a prisoner at Rome and received the revelation of a new calling, the creation of a 'new man' (Eph. 2:14,15) from Jew and Gentile, who were selected by the Father before creation (Eph. 1:4). This part of God's purpose had been a secret (mystery) hidden in God Himself (Eph. 3:9 R.V.), but was now a secret no longer (Eph. 3:3), but truth that God wanted to be proclaimed and made known (Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:24-27).

It was during this prison ministry that Paul wrote the epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 2 Timothy and Philemon, and a reading will demonstrate how the statement of the Lord in Acts 26:16-18 is fulfilled completely in them. First the abolition of darkness for light; 'the eyes of your understanding being (*having been*) *enlightened*' (Eph. 1:18 A.V.). The Father 'hath delivered us from the *power of darkness*' (Col. 1:13 A.V.), to 'turn them *from darkness to light*' (Acts 26:18). Their sins are completely forgiven (Eph. 1:6,7; Col. 1:14) because of the Lord's shed blood, the offering of Himself on Calvary's cross. These have a heavenly inheritance, they are made 'meet to be partakers of *the inheritance of the saints in (the) light*' (Col. 1:12 A.V.; compare with Acts 26:18). Such are *seated in the heavenly places in Christ* (Eph. 2:4-6) and are therefore advised not to concentrate on earthly things but on 'those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God' (Col. 3:1,2 A.V.). All this is part of the ministry committed to Paul in the promise of the Lord in Acts 26:16 (A.V.): 'those things in the which I will appear unto thee'. It was indeed a prison ministry where Paul was 'the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles' (Eph. 3:1) and these were in the mind of the Lord in Acts 26:17 (A.V.) '... Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee'. As far as the rest of the Acts is concerned it

was the gospel of grace that was given to the far-off Gentiles, but afterwards came the fuller revelation with the making known of the Secret that God had long hidden in Himself, but now specially revealed and declared in Paul's prison letters.

These Gentiles were once in a helpless and hopeless condition (Eph. 2:11-13), but in this new calling are brought near and united to the Lord Jesus, Who is the Centre and Head of this new company of believers (Col. 1:27 margin 'Christ *among* you'). Paul followed his previous statements by declaring his obedient response to the heavenly vision by preaching the good news given to him by the Lord, and because of this, and his reference to the despised Gentiles, the Jews seized him in the Temple courts and attempted to murder him; yet the apostle insisted that he had revealed nothing further than *the prophets and Moses* had declared and made known.

This is extremely helpful, for it gives us the extent of Paul's ministry and limits it to the Messianic kingdom of the Old Testament which, as we have seen, was the dominating theme of all the prophets (Acts 3:19-26); and also the kingdom good news of the Lord's earthly ministry and that of the period covered by the Acts of the Apostles. To introduce truth here that was to be revealed later by Paul as the prisoner for the Gentiles, after the laying aside of Israel in unbelief at the end of the Acts, only causes confusion and should be avoided. It contradicts what Paul has just said.

²⁴At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defence. "You are out of your mind, Paul!" he shouted. "Your great learning is driving you insane."

²⁵"I am not insane, most excellent Festus," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and reasonable. ²⁶The King is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. ²⁷King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do."

²⁸Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?"

²⁹Paul replied, "Short time or long — I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains."

³⁰The king rose, and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them. ³¹They left the room, and while talking with one another, they said, "This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment."

³²Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar." (Acts 26:24-32).

At this point in the speech Agrippa interrupted by shouting, 'Paul, you are out of your mind. Your great learning is driving you insane'. Paul answered, 'what I am saying is true and reasonable', and then he challenged the king: 'King Agrippa do you believe the prophets? I know you do'. This made the situation very awkward for Agrippa. He could not say that he disbelieved the prophets of the Old Testament. How could he get over this difficulty? He felt that the only way was to issue a challenge to Paul, so he answered, 'Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?' There is divergence of opinion among scholars regarding the translation. 'The Authorized rendering is impossible ... *en oligoi* does not mean "almost"', so Professor A.T. Robertson points out. It may refer to time (in a little time) or a short cut. Its most likely meaning is 'in short, you are trying to make me a Christian'. And Agrippa was certainly not responding in that way. He said, 'this man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar'.

So again the innocence of the apostle was stated. But he appealed to Caesar only after Festus had attempted to shift him back to Jerusalem. This would not have been necessary had Festus acted honourably and released him

after declaring his innocence in the eyes of Roman law. So Paul must be sent to Rome.

CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

¹When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment. ²We boarded a ship from Adramyttium about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia, and we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us.

³The next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs. ⁴From there we put out to sea again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us. ⁵When we had sailed across the open sea off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia. ⁶There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board. ⁷We made slow headway for many days and had difficulty arriving off Cnidus. When the wind did not allow us to hold our course, we sailed to the lee of Crete, opposite Salmone. ⁸We moved along the coast with difficulty and came to a place called Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea.

⁹Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Fast. So Paul warned them, ¹⁰"Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also." ¹¹But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship. ¹²Since the harbour was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there. This was a harbour in Crete, facing both south-west and north-west.

¹³When a gentle south wind began to blow, they thought they had obtained what they wanted; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. ¹⁴Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the

"north-easter", swept down from the island. ¹⁵The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. ¹⁶As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure. ¹⁷When the men had hoisted it aboard, they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Fearing that they would run aground on the sand-bars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. ¹⁸We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. ¹⁹On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. ²⁰When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.

²¹After the men had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. ²²But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. ²³Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me ²⁴and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' ²⁵So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. ²⁶Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island."

²⁷On the fourteenth night we were still being driven across the Adriatic Sea, when about midnight the sailors sensed they were approaching land. ²⁸They took soundings and found that the water was one hundred and twenty feet deep. A short time later they took soundings again and found it was ninety feet deep. ²⁹Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight. ³⁰In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow. ³¹Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay with

the ship, you cannot be saved." ³²So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it fall away.

³³Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. "For the last fourteen days," he said, "you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food — you haven't eaten anything. ³⁴Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head." ³⁵After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. ³⁶They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. ³⁷Altogether there were 276 of us on board. ³⁸When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea.

³⁹When daylight came, they did not recognise the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could. ⁴⁰Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach. ⁴¹But the ship struck a sand-bar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf.

⁴²The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. ⁴³But the centurion wanted to spare Paul's life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. ⁴⁴The rest were to get there on planks or on pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land in safety.' (Acts 27:1-44).

This chapter, which tells the story of the voyage and shipwreck of Paul, is a marvellous piece of descriptive writing, probably surpassing any other part of Scripture in this respect. Luke, who accompanied Paul on the voyage, gives a vivid and unforgettable word-picture of what he saw each day. The 'we' section is now resumed, having been broken off at 21:18. One of the finest handbooks to the study of this chapter is undoubtedly James Smith's *The*

Voyage and Shipwreck of St Paul and this has been acknowledged by practically every scholar who has attempted to expound the chapter. The first edition is dated 1848 and it has been out of print since its fourth edition of 1880. James Smith was an experienced yachtsman and a scholar. The part of the Mediterranean in which this voyage was made was well-known to him and he points out the accuracy of Luke's writing at each stage of the voyage.

We shall not go fully into the depths of its nautical technicalities but will be aided by the writings of a number of sound authors, and we shall comment on the verses.

27:1,2. Not only was Luke with Paul, but Aristarchus of Thessalonica as well (19:29). He had come with the apostle from Thessalonica to Jerusalem. The Roman authorities delivered Paul to a Roman centurion named Julius and he was responsible for the safe delivery of the apostle and some other prisoners when they reached Rome. It may be that Luke was allowed to accompany Paul as his physician. Aristarchus may have been treated as Paul's slave, for they would not have been allowed to accompany Paul as his friends. Luke's narrative shows that Julius treated Paul kindly and was considerate to him, and this must have eased things a little for the apostle. It is obvious that Julius respected Paul.

We are not told where they embarked, but it was probably Caesarea. There they found a coasting vessel from Adramyttium, a port of Mycia south of Troas in Asia Minor. The course of this ship took it to the ports along the coast of Asia en route to its home port.

3. The first port of call was Sidon of Phoenicia. Julius, the centurion, treated the apostle with kindness and gave him permission to go ashore while the ship was unloading, and also to visit his friends who formed the Christian community in that city.

4,5. Following the summer months, winds blew from the west, and the ship sailed between Cyprus and the mainland

rather than directly into the wind. Now it was necessary to leave the coast and sail across the open sea westward below Cilicia and Pamphylia. Myra of Lycia was a port of call for large ships sailing between Egypt and Rome, which found it impossible to sail directly across the sea because of the northwesterly winds.

6. At Myra they changed ships, taking a grain ship that was sailing from Alexandria to Italy. Egypt was the chief source of grain for Rome.

7. The voyage from Myra into the face of westerly winds was difficult, but after several days they arrived at Cnidus at the south-west tip of Asia Minor. From here they had the choice of waiting for a more favourable wind and going directly westward, or sailing southward toward Crete. Since 'the wind did not allow us to hold our course', Luke says, they chose the latter alternative and sailed southward around Salome at the eastern end of Crete and then coasted along westward under the island.

8. They moved along the coast with difficulty and came to a port called Fair Havens, halfway along the island. West of this port the coast of Crete falls off abruptly to the north, and here a ship would be exposed completely to northwest winds. The boats used in the ancient Mediterranean world were not large or sturdy enough to face the winter storms. The dangerous season for sailing began about September 14th., and after November 11th. all sailing came to an end for the winter.

9. Luke refers to a fast (which was the Day of Atonement) which occurred at the end of September or early in October.

10,11. In 2 Corinthians 11:25, Paul says he was shipwrecked three times. With his travelling experience, he advised against going on at this time of the year lest they suffered much loss of life and cargo. But this advice was opposed by the captain, who was in control of navigation and was the owner of the ship. The centurion Julius

followed the advice of the ship's master rather than that of Paul and decided not to stay at Fair Havens.

12. It was not a suitable harbour to winter in because of its exposure. The majority on the ship advised that they sail from Fair Havens hoping that they might reach Phoenix with its harbour which lay further west in Crete, facing south-west and north-west.

13. At first they were favoured with a gentle south wind and were able to keep close along the shore of the island.

14. Suddenly, however, this gentle breeze turned into a tempestuous wind blowing from the north-east. It was called Euroclydon, meaning 'northeaster', a hybrid word partly Greek and partly Latin.

15. At this point they were not far from their destination, Phoenix, but when the ship could not head into the wind because of its violence, they had to surrender to the wind and be driven by it.

16. As they came opposite to a small island called Cauda (some manuscripts read Claudia), they found it necessary to pull on board the small boat that was towed behind the ship. It was secured only with difficulty.

17. They then passed ropes under the ship to hold it together and strengthen it. The ship was now being driven towards the south-west in the direction of Cyrene. Near the African shore was a dangerous quicksand called Syrtis. They then lowered the sea anchor to avoid being run aground on these sand banks.

18,19. The storm was no better on the next day, so they were forced to throw the cargo overboard and the day following they threw overboard all extra tackle and gear.

20. The sailors were entirely dependent on the sun and stars for navigation, and when these were not seen for several days, they gave up all hope of being saved.

21-26. The severe conditions they had experienced had caused them to go a long time without food and they were all weakened, so Paul encouraged them by saying that he had been given a vision by God which assured him that all would escape the peril they were in and they would stand finally before Caesar. The apostle assured them that God would do just what He had said and he fully believed God. What a fine testimony to real faith!

27. They were drifting across the sea of Adria. This does not refer to the Adriatic sea, but is a term commonly used of the entire eastern Mediterranean. The sailors began to believe they were approaching land. Probably the sound of breakers came through the darkness and warned they were getting near to land.

28. Soundings indicated that the water was growing increasingly shallow.

29. They then dropped four anchors to avoid being dashed against the rocks.

30-32. Some of the sailors, to avoid the risk of falling on the rocks, decided to escape from the ship. Paul detected this and warned the centurion, who frustrated the plan by getting the soldiers to cut away the ropes of the boat and thus let it fall away.

33-38. At daybreak Paul advised the crew and passengers to eat some food and be strengthened by it, and he assured them that none would perish in the landing that lay ahead. He then set the example by giving thanks to God and eating a substantial meal (we can say definitely that he was not celebrating the Lord's supper by breaking bread!). All were encouraged, and after they had eaten, they cast the rest of the cargo of wheat into the sea to lighten the ship in preparation for landing.

39-40. When daylight came they were able to see the shore although they did not recognise the land. However, they spotted a bay with a beach and decided to land there. So 'they cut loose the anchors and left them in the sea' (this is

a far more probable translation than the A.V.) There were two large steering-rudders on each side of the boat which would have been lashed tight during the storm. These were freed and a small foresail was raised to the wind (not mainsail, A.V.), and the ship headed towards the shore.

41. However, the ship ran aground on a narrow strip of submerged land separating two stretches of deeper water. The bow of the ship stuck fast in this shoal, but the force of the water was breaking the ship in two.

42-44. The soldiers guarding the prisoners wished to follow the traditional Roman discipline and kill their charges rather than risk the escape of any of them. But Julius, the centurion, had become favourably disposed towards Paul and did not wish to see his death. So he ordered all to escape to the shore either by swimming, or by floating on planks and pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached the land in safety.

So Luke in this marvellous narrative shows how God's promise to Paul was fulfilled, a wonderful example of God's providence and care.

CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT.

¹Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. ²The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. ³Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. ⁴When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, "This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live." ⁵But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. ⁶The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead, but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.

⁷There was an estate near by that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and for three days entertained us hospitably. ⁸His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. ⁹When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. ¹⁰They honoured us in many ways and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed.

¹¹After three months we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island. It was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux. ¹²We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days. ¹³From there we set sail and arrived at Rhegium. The next day the south wind came up, and on the following day we reached Puteoli. ¹⁴There we found some brothers who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. ¹⁵The brothers there had heard that we were coming, and they travelled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged.

16When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him.' (Acts 28:1-16).

When they had come ashore, they discovered that the island was called Melita (our modern Malta). It was inhabited by people of Phoenician extraction, lying about 100 miles south of Sicily. From the Roman and Greek point of view everyone who spoke a foreign language was called a barbarian. Barbarous people (A.V.) does not refer to fierce character or primitive culture. It merely indicates that their language was neither Greek nor Latin.

It was a cold, rainy morning and the men from the ship must have been wet and shivering. How they must have appreciated the friendly reception they received from the Maltese people and their practical concern by lighting a fire to warm and dry them!

Paul, as usual the practical and helpful man, made himself useful by gathering brushwood to keep the fire burning. Melita is a Canaanite word meaning 'refuge', given by Phoenician sailors, and those who had been shipwrecked now proved this name to be true.

As the apostle put the brushwood on the fire, a snake crept from the fire and fastened on to his hand. But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects.

At first the Maltese thought Paul to be a criminal whom Divine Justice had punished, but when they saw he was unhurt they changed their minds and said he must be a god.

Luke now records other cases of miraculous healing. The chief official of the island named Publius, lived nearby. His father was seriously ill with fever and dysentery. Paul went to see him, and after praying he healed him. When this became known in the island, those that were ill came to Paul and were cured of whatever illness they had. Miraculous healing was one of the sign-gifts relating to the earthly kingdom that occur throughout the Gospels and to the end of Acts.

Later on, after the Acts period, we may be surprised to find that Paul cannot heal. Valued fellow-workers Epaphroditus and Trophimus are seriously ill, but Paul does not heal them, whereas once even a cloth from his body would have healed at a distance (Acts 19:11,12 and see Philippians 2:25-27; 2 Timothy 4:20). There is only one satisfactory answer. After the end of the Acts a new dispensation sets in with new conditions. This we will consider later on.

During the three months' stay in Malta Paul and his friends were evidently honoured with many honours, and an Alexandrian ship was loaded with everything they needed for the remaining journey.

The shipwreck had taken place in November. Three months later, the middle of February, would have been considered somewhat early for sailing, but apparently an early spring had come and they found a ship sailing from Alexandria to Italy which had spent the winter in the island. It had as its figurehead The Dioscuri, meaning the two sons of Zeus, Castor and Pollux, and these were regarded as the patron deities of sailors (verse 11).

Sailing north they came to Syracuse, the important city of Sicily, located on the south-eastern side of the island. The winds were not favourable, so from Syracuse it was necessary to make a circuit, or tack back and forth, in order to reach Rhegium (note the A.V. old English 'we fetched a compass'). Here they waited for a more favourable wind and this happened the next day, because the south wind arose and they then reached Puteoli in the bay of Naples, the regular port of arrival of grain ships coming from Alexandria.

Paul and his friends were able to stay a week with Christian friends there and then at last they reached their destination — Rome. Christian brethren came down the Appian Way to meet Paul and Luke and accompany them back to the city. The Forum of Appias was some 43 miles from Rome, and the Three Taverns was about 10 miles

nearer. Both were inns where travellers might lodge. Meeting the brethren encouraged Paul and, when they reached Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself with a soldier to guard him.

¹⁷Three days later he called together the leaders of the Jews. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: "My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. ¹⁸They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. ¹⁹But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar — not that I had any charge to bring against my own people. ²⁰For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain."

²¹They replied, "We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of the brothers who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. ²²But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect."

²³They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. ²⁴Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. ²⁵They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet:

²⁶"Go to this people and say,

"You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving." ²⁷For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with

their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'

²⁸"Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!"

³⁰For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. ³¹Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.' (Acts 28:17-31).

Paul could not go to the synagogue, as his custom was, being bound to a Roman soldier. So he invited the Jews to come to his lodging. He wanted one more opportunity of making known God's long-suffering with the nation of Israel and the wonders of the kingdom of God and the Gospel message. He was sure that false reports had come to Rome regarding the things that had happened to him and he was concerned that these Jewish leaders in Rome should know the truth. This explains his opening words to them (verses 17-19). But his desire and purpose did not stop here for he said in verse 20 :

'For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the *hope of Israel* that I am bound with this chain'.

What does the hope of Israel mean? We can be saved from guessing by carefully noting the context. The apostle had referred to this hope before Agrippa. He said, 'it is because of *my hope in what God has promised our fathers*, that I am on trial today. This is the promise *our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled* as they earnestly serve God day and night' (26:6,7). The reader will note that Paul says 'twelve tribes' as James did in his epistle (1:1). The figment of the lost ten tribes is unknown to the Scriptures.

The hope mentioned by Paul, and which he calls the hope of Israel in Acts 28:20, is related to what God promised the fathers (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) and it was something that had not yet been fulfilled for Israel. This shows that Israel was *not cut off at the cross*, for the twelve

tribes were still waiting for it (26:6,7). When they had fixed another day to meet (verse 23), Luke tells us that Paul spent the whole day on the subject of the kingdom of God *as made known in Moses and the Prophets* and Christ's relation to the promises contained therein. The kingdom of God is a big covering-title for the final rule of God over the whole of His creation and must include the heavens as well as the earth, for it occurs in the later prison epistles of Paul as well as the period covered by the Lord's earthly ministry to Israel and the continuation of it in the Acts. When the purposes of God are finally completed and brought to a triumphant conclusion, the rule of God through Christ cannot exclude any part of the new universe of a new heaven and earth, or that rule will not be complete.

This does not mean that the earthly and heavenly regions are muddled together and cannot be distinguished in Scripture. The muddling is done by ourselves who do not carefully note the words and phrases that are used by God therein.

In the context we are dealing with, Paul has linked the kingdom of God and the hope of Israel with promises which God has made to the fathers of Israel, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and David as well.

There are a number of divine promises made known in Scripture, and the first three can be found in Genesis. Promises can be of two kinds, conditional and unconditional, but the promises which are basic to God's great kingdom purposes are unconditional and therefore have a sure and unchangeable foundation.

God made three unconditional covenants with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob respectively, which involved the seed, their *descendants*, and the *land*. God said to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 : '*all peoples on earth will be blessed through you*'.

In Genesis 15:18 we read :

'On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your *descendants* I give *this land*, from the *river of Egypt* (the Nile) to the great river, *the Euphrates* ... "'

see also 13:14-17, which further confirms this prophecy.

In chapter 26:3,4 the prophecy is repeated to Isaac :

'³Stay in *this land* for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to *you and your descendants* I will give *all these lands* and will *confirm the oath* I swore to your father Abraham. ⁴I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will *give them all these lands*, and *through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed*'

and once more it is confirmed, this time to Jacob in Genesis 28:10-14 :

'¹⁰Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. ... he ... lay down to sleep. ¹²He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven ... ¹³There above it stood the LORD, and He said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give *you and your descendants the land on which you are lying*. ¹⁴*Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.*"'

God made this promise even more emphatic *by taking an oath on it* (Gen. 26:3), which only shows how important God regards these unconditional promises or covenants to be. They are made concerning Abraham's descendants, his seed, which as Romans 9:6-8 states, come through Isaac and relate to the nation of Israel. They must include Christ, because as Matthew 1:1 tells us, He is 'the Son of David, *the Son of Abraham*' and all God's promises are centred in Him.

The land with its geographic boundaries is described in Genesis 15, and it is a large portion of the Middle East which Israel has never possessed fully. In the palmiest days of Solomon's reign, a large portion of it came under his rule, but not all of it, and, in any case, Israel was still confined to Palestine, so this cannot be taken as a fulfilment of this promise regarding the land.

Here then we have a two-fold, wonderful and unconditional promise made by God concerning Israel, which involves them and their land, and *this must therefore be part of the hope of Israel*. One cannot reduce it just to Gentile blessing through Israel and, in fact, in each of these covenants to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God states that through their seed *all people on earth will be blessed*. This is surely looking forward to the establishment of God's earthly kingdom which finally will be world-wide, when the knowledge of the glory of God will cover *all* the earth (Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14) and Christ will be 'King over *all* the earth' (Zech. 14:9) and his rule paramount.

This is the kingdom promised by 'all the prophets' (Acts 3:24,25) and the Old Testament writers give their wonderful description of this blessed and happy time. This cannot be entered into in detail at this juncture. It is a tremendous subject in itself and as yet has never been realised in all its fulness. It was near at hand when the Messiah and King was here in the flesh, waiting for Israel to receive Him as such. He Himself declared this kingdom was yet future, for the 'Lord's prayer' states that the kingdom *will* come (Matt. 6:10) and if it was already present, that item of the prayer would not have been needed. It could have come then, had Israel not rejected and murdered their Saviour and King, and again in the Acts it was offered to them but rejected once more. Now it awaits the Second Coming of Him, in power and great glory as He promised, Who is 'King of kings and Lord of lord's'. He will then take the reins of government and introduce a righteous rule over all the earth. This will also be the time of Israel's national salvation, when at last they

can take their place as the world's greatest missionaries, and this is entirely based on the New Covenant of grace as we shall see.

The hope of Israel cannot be understood apart from the Old Testament. To try to limit it to the preaching of the gospel of grace in the New Testament, as some do, is to miss most of its essential points. Salvation, of course, is the basis of God's kingdom, but its hope includes the promises to the fathers we have been considering. Others see the pre-eminence of Israel in the Old Testament and this is correct (see Deut. 26:18,19; 28:1,13; Psa. 147:20), but at the same time we must realise that it was conditional. God introduces an 'if' (Deut. 28:1) and Israel failed to keep God's condition. So it is assumed that there is no future for Israel in God's kingdom purposes. But this is wrong because God's New Covenant grace relating to them has been left out. Jeremiah 31:31-37 must be carefully studied here, noting that it is primarily given to Israel :

³¹"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ³²It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke My covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. ³³"This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people. ³⁴No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

³⁵This is what the LORD says,

He who appoints the sun to shine by day, Who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar — the LORD Almighty is His name:
³⁶"Only if these decrees vanish from My sight," declares

the LORD, "will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before Me."

³⁷This is what the LORD says:

"Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done," declares the LORD.'

These verses for so long have been interpreted of Gentile believers that Israel has been forgotten; but it was to *this* nation that they were given in the first instance. The God of Israel is a God of grace as these wonderful verses show. Not only will God forgive Israel's sins, He will forget them too (verse 34). God throws out a challenge, He will never cast Israel off unless someone can be found who can abolish the creation of the sun, moon and stars! *Only then will Israel cease to be a nation before Him for ever* (verses 35,36). Or if the heavens above can be measured and the earth's foundations discovered — only if these things come to pass will God reject the nation of Israel because of all they have done! (verse 37). Words could not be stronger to prove that in spite of Israel's failure they will not cease to exist, but will be His people again, for God Himself will write His law and His truth in their hearts and minds. In other words, they are usable by God again in spite of all their sin and failure.

Paul states the same thing in Romans 11:2 (A.V.): 'God hath *not* cast away His people which He foreknew'. There is a time coming for their salvation as a nation. Their blindness and hardening of heart are temporary. This will last only '*until the full number of the Gentiles has come in*' (Rom. 11:25), and then '*all Israel will be saved*' (verse 26). The apostle then refers (Rom. 11:27) to the Second Coming of Christ, when this will happen, and the Lord says, 'this is My covenant with them when I take away their sins', a direct reference to the New Covenant (Isa. 59:20,21; Jer. 31:33,34). At that time, as Isaiah 60:21 (A.V.) says, 'Thy

people (Israel) also shall be *all righteous*: they shall *inherit the land for ever*'.

The restoration of Israel is a vast subject occupying a large place in the Old Testament. The interested reader is referred to Ezekiel 36:22-38. Note also Ezekiel 37:19-28 (A.V.). It refers to the 'land ... given unto Jacob ... *wherein your fathers dwelt*' (the land we have already considered), in which Israel shall dwell *for ever* (verse 25), the *everlasting* covenant of peace made with them, and God's sanctuary *dwelling in their midst for evermore* (verses 26-28).

These words show plainly that they are a prophecy concerning Israel that has never been fulfilled in past history, but will be so in the future, for God cannot break His word. They deal with Israel's final restoration at Christ's Second Coming.

But we have already noted that the Acts of the Apostles commences with restoration. After 40 days' instruction by the Lord Jesus concerning the kingdom of God, they asked a question which referred to those weeks of study when they said, 'Lord are you *at this time* going to *restore the kingdom to Israel?*' And His answer was not a rebuke to them when He replied, 'it is not for you to know the time or dates the Father has set by His own authority'. He could not reveal the *time of the restoration*, because, in His foreknowledge, He knew that Israel were going to sink completely into unbelief and disobey the commandment of God to repent and turn back to Him, and because of this the kingdom would have to be further postponed. They had already rejected this kingdom which had been proclaimed by their Messiah and King, and to have revealed further rejection by Israel could have been used by them as an excuse to do it!

We would remind the reader that '*to restore*' is not to bring in something new but *to bring back something that existed before*. This was the kingdom which was the great subject of revelation through the Old Testament prophets

(Acts 3:24-26), and Peter assured his Jewish hearers that '*God would restore everything as He promised long ago through His holy prophets*' (Acts 3:21). That restoration of the kingdom could have happened had Israel accepted their Messiah when He came in the flesh; after that, during the Acts, they were given another opportunity to do so and, had this come to pass, Christ would have returned to them and the kingdom would have been set up there and then. The Lord had prayed, 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do', and God's holding back judgment on Israel all through the Acts was the answer to that prayer.

But in Paul's first speech at Antioch he gave a warning to the Jews :

'Take care that what the prophets have said *does not happen to you*: "Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you"' (Acts 13:40,41), see also the words of Peter in Acts 3:22,23. But Israel did not heed. They constantly opposed everything that Paul was witnessing to — the gospel of grace and the wonders of God's kingdom — until at last God's patience ran out and the judgment fell on them in A.D. 70..

The Jewish leaders at Rome arranged to meet Paul on a certain day and the apostle spent *the whole day* expounding *the kingdom from Moses and the Prophets*, showing how their Messiah and King had the central place in this rule of God. But their answer was the same. Some were convinced, but others refused to believe, just as they had been doing all along. Paul was then guided to pronounce the terrible words of Isaiah 6:9,10, which are quoted on page 235, and which the reader should carefully consider. They described the Israel of Isaiah's day. Their blindness and deafness was through their own doing and sprang from minds so hard that even God's gracious promises made no impression on them. This was an absolute negation of the New Covenant (Jer. 31:33). And their descendants at the time Paul spoke these words were no better: they resisted

the Holy Spirit. He told them (verse 28) that the Gentiles had heard the gospel and believed it and would continue to do so. But not his fellow countrymen; they rejected it, and for them there was only the darkness of unbelief. In this condition God laid them aside, where they have been for nearly two millennia, for even today the orthodox Jew still rejects the Lord Jesus Christ as Messiah.

The word translated 'they departed' is *apoluo*, which in a good sense means 'to release', 'to send away', but also is used in a bad sense meaning 'to divorce' a wife (Matt. 1:19; 5:31,32 which are the first four occurrences of the verb in the New Testament). It should be remembered that Israel's relationship to the Lord has been construed in terms of marriage (Jer. 3:14; 31:31,32); but they proved to be an unfaithful wife, and now the time had come for separation. This state will last until the Lord's second Advent, when they will look on Him Whom they pierced and rejected and when at last they will repent and be restored and forgiven.

The closing verses of Acts tell us that Paul stayed in his own rented house for two years and gladly received all who came to him. Here he had no hindrance and was able to boldly expound the kingdom of God, especially that which related to its heavenly aspect as his later prison epistles show. Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon were evidently written during these two years' imprisonment, and in them the apostle gives the revelation he had from Christ concerning truth which the Lord had kept secret, hidden in Himself — but now revealed in all its fulness and wonder. This concerned the rule of God *in the highest heavens* and the creation of the 'new man' of Ephesians 2:15, culminating in the holy Temple built by God for an eternal Home for Himself (Eph. 2:20-22). Paul's greatest desire was to make 'all see' ['all' relates to those 'chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world', that is before creation (Eph. 1:4; 3:8,9)] as this was the desire of God (Col. 1:24-29). The epistles Paul wrote during the Acts period, giving them in order, are Galatians,

1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Corinthians and Romans.* It seems clear that Paul was released from this imprisonment at Rome after his two years' detention and then, possibly in A.D. 64, he was again apprehended and soon after this martyred. Before this took place he was able to write 2 Timothy, his last letter, in which he urged Timothy to come to him quickly as there was little time left. With this agrees the tradition quoted by Eusebius (Ecclesiastical History ii. s22) 'that after defending himself the apostle was sent again on his ministry of preaching and coming a second time to the same city (Rome), suffered martyrdom under Nero'. During this free time he was able to write 1 Timothy and Titus and do a certain amount of travelling, but we cannot say for certain that he realised his objective of reaching Spain as mentioned in his Roman epistle.

There are some scholars who believe one or more of these later epistles were written from Ephesus or Caesarea, but this has not been proved. The three Pastoral Epistles show a ministry of travelling and preaching that cannot be fitted into the Acts.

Some scholars talk about the abrupt ending of the Acts, but this is not necessary if one sees the strong possibility that Luke wrote the Acts during Paul's two year imprisonment. We know from Philemon 24 and Colossians 4:14 that Luke was with Paul during this interval in Rome. Luke could have gathered material for his narrative during Paul's two year detention at Caesarea and composed the Acts during the two years at Rome. If this is so, and it is most probable, the Acts of the Apostles ends because at that time there was nothing more to record. He carried events no further because they had gone no further than what he had written.

*Regarding Hebrews and its human authorship, the reader is directed to *Perfection or Perdition* by Stuart Allen and Charles H. Welch, obtainable from *The Berean Publishing Trust*; also to William Leonard's *The Authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Polyglot Press, Australia).

AFTERWARDS

Before we finish the study of this wonderful book there are one or two important details to mention. As we have seen, the position given to Israel in the Old Testament as first among the nations is sometimes represented as being nothing more than crude, national power which would enable Israel to dominate all the other nations, and when the apostles asked the Lord about restoring the kingdom to Israel (in chapter one) it was this power that they had in mind. But the Old Testament knows of no such kingdom, for basically it is a spiritual kingdom that is in view which, however, when established will have a *practical effect upon the whole world*. In Exodus 19:3-6 Moses was told to say to Israel :

‘ ... "This is ... what you are to tell the people of Israel: ⁴You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. ⁵Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession. Although the whole earth is Mine, ⁶you will be for Me *a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

This spiritual priesthood was the sense in which Israel was to be the premier nation of the earth. *There has never been such a priestly kingdom on earth*, and in control and ruling them in the fulness of time would be the King-Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, who would be a *Priest upon His throne* (Zech. 6:12,13). This is an essential if ever a kingdom of God is to be established. As Priest, He can deal with sin. As the sinless and almighty King He can rule righteously and so God's righteous rule can be spread and be upheld world-wide.

It may be that some of the Jewish leaders, tired of being under the domination of a Gentile power, Rome, had

nothing more than an earthly conception of Messiah's kingdom, but this is not the kingdom of the Scriptures and it should not be inferred that this is all the apostles had in mind when they enquired of the Lord Jesus the time of the restoration of this kingdom to Israel.

Once we realise the place of Israel in the book of Acts and the re-offer of this kingdom to them, to be followed by the early return of Christ, we are free from the great problem of the promise of that near return of Christ which did not come to pass. As we have shown in our *Unfolding Purpose of God** page 43, all the early epistles of Paul, also those of Peter, James and John, make clear that the hope of believers was *the imminent return of the Saviour*. It certainly was not a coming that would take place some 2,000 years later! The Scriptures referred to are 1 Corinthians 1:6,7; 7:29; 10:11; 16:22 (margin); Romans 16:20; 13:12; Hebrews 10:37; 1 Peter 4:7; James 5:7-9; Jude 14; 1 John 2:18. But the wonderful promise of the return of the Lord given through Peter's lips in Acts 3:19-26 was *conditional* and would be true only if Israel obeyed *the divine command to repent and turn back to God* (Acts 3:19). As our studies in the Acts have shown, *Israel did not repent and resisted the Holy Spirit*, so at Acts 28 they were laid aside in unbelief and the earthly kingdom was again postponed. There was no question of Christ and the apostles having made a mistake here.

We find the terrible words of Isaiah 6:9,10 are used by the Lord Jesus at a critical point in His earthly ministry to Israel. In Matthew 11:20 the Lord began to denounce the cities where most of His mighty works and miracles had been performed. These miracles, as we have seen, had been predicted in the Old Testament concerning the Messiah when He came (Isa. 35:4-6). At the beginning of the Acts Peter stated, 'Jesus of Nazareth was a Man *accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs*,

*See also *On Reading the Bible* pp 43-73, obtainable from *The Berean Publishing Trust*.

which God did among you through Him, as you yourselves know' (Acts 2:22), and this is also stressed in Hebrews 2:3,4 '... This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard Him. God also testified to it *by signs, wonders and various miracles*'. The miracles performed by the Lord Jesus were not in order to stagger people as they watched Him, but *God's confirmation of His ministry to Israel*. They were a confirmation to them that believed (1 Cor. 1:6,7) and a divine witness against those who believed not (1 Cor. 14:21,22).

When we see this we can better understand the Lord's denunciation of the cities where most of these signs were given and the terrible judgment of God that would fall on them. In Matthew chapter 12 Christ is presented as 'greater than the Temple' (the Priest, 12:6); 'greater than Jonah' (the Prophet, 12:41); 'greater than Solomon' (the King, 12:42); and He was rejected by Israel's leaders in this three-fold capacity. The Lord, in the next chapter of Matthew, refers to this by quoting the solemn words of Isaiah 6:8-10, which now applied to these leaders and the people that followed them. They had deliberately closed their eyes and deafened their ears through their unbelieving minds and rejection of the truth.

When John the Baptist's faith wavered and he wondered whether Christ was the real Messiah after all, the Lord referred to these evidential miracles to reassure him :

²When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples ³to ask Him, "Are you the one who was to come or should we expect someone else?"

⁴Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. ⁶Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of Me." (Matt. 11:2-6).

We must remember that these Jews, living in the land of Palestine, were only a part of the nation of Israel. Many thousands lived abroad and were known technically as the Dispersion. To be perfectly fair they must have the same opportunity of hearing the kingdom promise of salvation and restoration that the Palestine Jews had had.

Hence the ministry of Peter and Paul during the Acts which put Israel first (Acts 3:26; 13:46), the sphere being largely the Roman Empire, where the Dispersion was found.

When Paul wrote his last epistle in the Acts period he asked the question in Romans 10:18 (A.V.), 'have they (Israel) not heard?' At this time the answer with truth was, 'yes they have', but that could not have been true at the end of the Lord's earthly ministry for He dealt only with the Israelites living in Palestine. *All* Israel had now had the opportunity of repenting and turning to God, but the verdict of the Holy Spirit in Acts 28 was that the nation as a whole were in the darkness of unbelief and rejection, and were unusable by the Lord. Nowhere in the Old Testament was it revealed what would happen afterwards if Israel failed in this way. Nor could the Old Testament reveal it because this concerned a Secret hidden in God. But God was not surprised when this happened and, when it did, He made known the great Secret (Mystery) in the further letters of Paul (Ephesians and Colossians) from his Roman prison after the Acts. Here was the *creation* of a new company of the redeemed — a 'new man' (Eph. 2:14,15), with a new sphere of blessing where Christ sitteth at the right hand of the Father (Eph. 1:19-21). And *there* is where this company is blessed, *for they are seen to be seated with their Head, the Lord Jesus*, in the highest glory (Eph. 2:4-6). No wonder they are to seek 'the above things' where Christ is now enthroned (Col. 3:1,2) and not the things on earth, for this will not be their eternal home.

The heavens of Scripture are far more wonderful than is generally reckoned by believers. Most of them seem to

think that heaven is just one big place in which all the redeemed are placed. But what did Paul mean when he said he was caught away 'to the *third heaven*'? (2 Cor. 12:2).

This cannot be explained away by calling these words a Jewish conception. And what does it mean when we are told that Christ 'ascended up *far above all heavens*'? (Eph. 4:10 A.V.). How many heavens are there then?

When the Lord Jesus referred to it figuratively He said, 'in My Father's house are *many rooms* ... I am going there to prepare a place for you' (John 14:2); 'many rooms' are somewhat different from one big room, which is how most believers view heaven. The word is of course sometimes used in the singular, but this is evidently a covering title.

Because of our limited minds and limited power of understanding, we all have a tendency to 'scale down' the almightiness and wonder of God's great purposes. Tradition and custom are very powerful forces which can hold us in bondage. We must make it our aim not to go further than the Word of God reveals. If we do, then we are in the realm of our own faulty and limited understanding. On the other hand we shall be very unwise if we do not go *all the way that Holy Scripture reveals*. And it does reveal at least three spheres of blessing for the redeemed in the future :

(1) The Lord Jesus stated, 'blessed are the meek, for *they shall inherit the earth*'. He is quoting from Psalm 37, where this phrase occurs four times (verses 11,22,29,34, and 'land' and 'earth' are translations of the same Hebrew word).

(2) *The heavenly city, the New Jerusalem* which John describes so vividly in Revelation 21, is heavenly in character, but its final destiny is not to stay in heaven, but to leave it and descend to the new earth (Rev. 3:12; 21:2,10). Among other things we are told that the 'kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it' (24 A.V.).

This is the glorious city that Abraham and the overcomers of Hebrews 11 looked forward to by faith and the church of the Acts period looked on as 'our mother' (Gal. 4:26). Figuratively it is likened to a bride (2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 21:2,9). It is also called by Paul 'a remnant according to the election of grace' (Rom. 11:1-5 A.V.), for even in the worst times of apostasy, God never left Himself without a witness. This company consisted of the faithful Jews who responded to the good news in the four Gospels and in the Acts, together with believing Gentiles, who were grafted in to Israel to share all their covenant blessings, like a wild olive grafted into the true one (Rom. 11:13-27). The true olive was the nation of Israel (Jer. 11:16).

(3) The calling and hope of the newly created 'new man' of Ephesians 2:14-16, is so near to Christ that it is looked on as His Body, He Himself being the Head (Eph. 1:19-23). Its members are seen in the highest heavens, seated together where Christ is now exalted (Eph. 2:4-6), and hence they are warned to let their thinking be constantly where Christ is enthroned, and not on earthly things (Col. 3:1,2).

Now, if these three spheres of blessing mean the same thing, then words are useless for the purpose of revelation and we might as well close the Book.

We should also remember Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13 that *now* we only know *in part*. Now, 'we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror', but later on, in resurrection glory, 'we shall see face to face'. Now, our knowledge is only partial at its best; then, *we shall know fully at last*. At the present moment 'no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him' (1 Cor. 2:9,10), but some of it God has revealed and it is a foretaste of all the coming glory of the ascended Christ and His Body with Him. One is reminded of the hymn of F.W.Faber, 'souls of men, why will ye scatter like a crowd of frightened sheep?' and the verses that follow :

There's a wideness in God's mercy
 Like the wideness of the sea,
 There's a kindness in His justice
 Which is more than liberty.

For the love of God is broader
 Than the measures of man's mind;
 And the heart of the Eternal
 Is most wonderfully kind.

There is plentiful redemption
 In the blood that has been shed;
 There is joy for all the members
 In the sorrows of the Head.

If our love were but more simple
 We should take Him at His Word,
 And our lives be filled with gladness
 From the presence of the Lord.

There can be no doubt that in Paul's prison letters after the Acts period there is overwhelming spiritual wealth awaiting the exploration of faith. If we are believers, why do we not go in and 'posses our possessions'? Never mind what other people say of us. *It is Christ's verdict which finally counts*, and if we please Him, this is all that matters.

We conclude by giving the eight occurrences of the word 'riches' in the prison Epistles of Paul :

'In Him (Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, *according to the riches of His grace* which He lavished upon us' (Eph. 1:7 R.S.V.).

'... that you may know ... what are *the riches* of His glorious inheritance in the saints' (Eph. 1:18 R.S.V.).

'... that in the coming ages He might show *the immeasurable riches* of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus' (Eph. 2:7 R.S.V.).

‘To me (Paul), though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles *the unsearchable riches of Christ*’ (Eph. 3:8 R.S.V.).

‘... that *according to the riches of His glory* He may grant you to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man’ (Eph. 3:16 R.S.V.).

‘And my God will supply every need of yours *according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus*’ (Phil. 4:19 R.S.V.).

‘To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the *riches of the glory* of this mystery (secret) ... ’ (Col. 1:27 R.S.V.).

‘... to have all the *riches of assured understanding* and the knowledge of God’s mystery (secret), of Christ, in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ (Col. 2:2,3 R.S.V.).

Let us ask the Holy Spirit, the great Revealer of Truth, to open the eyes of our understanding so we get to know this ‘high calling of God in Christ Jesus’ (Phil. 3:14A.V.), and then we should seek grace and strength to pass it on to others.

Paul looked upon all this wondrous revelation as God’s sacred truth which had been *entrusted to him*. He faithfully passed it on to the one who was to follow him, Timothy, and warned him to ‘*guard what has been entrusted to your care*’ (1 Tim. 6:20), and in his turn he was to ‘*entrust to reliable men*’ all that he had heard Paul teach; and these faithful men must be ‘qualified to teach others’ (2 Tim. 2:1,2) so that this precious truth could be passed on and preserved for others to receive and live out in practice. Through Christ’s almighty power and purpose, this glorious teaching has come down to us and now we are entrusted with it. Have we realised this in practice?

There is in the future the verdict of the Lord’s judgment seat to face! (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:9,10) and we should constantly bear this in mind.

We come now to the end of Luke's wonderful narrative. Surely Sir William Ramsay was not far wrong when he described Luke as the greatest of all historians.

This man's faithful ministry (2 Tim. 4:11) is a clear example of what the life and service of a believer in Christ should be. We praise the Lord for raising up such a man to contribute to the Scriptures of truth, thus preparing us to receive by faith the revelation of God's great Secret (Mystery, A.V.), hid in Himself, and therefore completely unknowable until the time He chose to reveal it. This He did not do until the failure of Israel at the end of the Acts. Israel had dominated the scene since the days of the sons of Jacob. Now at Israel's complete failure they are by-passed by the Lord and the ascended Christ makes the great revelation known to Paul in his prison and bids him pass it on to the believers of his day. This he does in the prison letters of Ephesians and Colossians.

The tremendous Secret concerns the eternal home God is now building for Himself in the highest glory. The figure of a Body in Ephesians one is changed to a holy Temple in chapter two, and each believer in it is likened to a stone which is being perfectly shaped and placed in position by the great Architect and Builder (Eph. 2:19-22), and when the last one is put in the right place and the building completed, it will become 'A HOME FOR GOD' (verse 22) which He will enter and fill with His glory for eternity.

Can any human being enjoy a greater honour than to be part of it? This is what the Word of God sets before believers in Christ for their faith and response!

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