

Commentary on the Book of Acts Bible Study Notes and Comments

by David E. Pratte



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***Commentary on the Book of Acts:
Bible Study Notes and Comments***

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Front page photo

The Mount of Olives from which Jesus ascended back to heaven

“Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight ... Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem...” – Acts 1:9,12 (NKJV).

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Notes to the Reader

To save space and for other reasons, I have chosen not to include the Bible text in these notes (please use your Bible to follow along). When I do quote a Scripture, I generally quote the New King James Version, unless otherwise indicated. Often – especially when I do not use quotations marks – I am not quoting any translation but simply paraphrasing the passage in my own words. Also, when I ask the reader to refer to a map, please consult the maps at the back of your Bible or in a Bible dictionary.

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Introductory Thoughts about Commentaries

Only the Scriptures provide an infallible, authoritatively inspired revelation of God's will for man (2 Timothy 3:16,17). It follows that this commentary, like all commentaries, was written by an uninspired, fallible human. It is the author's effort to share his insights about God's word for the purpose of instructing and edifying others in the knowledge and wisdom found in Scripture. It is simply another form of teaching, like public preaching, Bible class teaching, etc., except in written form (like tracts, Bible class literature, etc.). Nehemiah 8:8; Ephesians 4:15,16; Romans 15:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:12-14; 5:12-14; 10:23-25; Romans 10:17; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 8:4; 2 Timothy 2:2,24-26; 4:2-4; 1 Peter 3:15.

It follows that the student must read any commentary with discernment, realizing that any fallible teacher may err, whether he is teaching orally or in writing. So, the student must compare all spiritual teaching to the truth of God's word (Acts 17:11). It may be wise to read several commentaries to consider alternative views on difficult points. But it is especially important to consider the *reasons or evidence* each author gives for his views, then compare them to the Bible.

For these reasons, the author urges the reader to always consider my comments in light of Scripture. Accept what I say only if you find that it harmonizes with God's word. And please do not cite my writings as authority, as though people should accept anything I say as authoritative. Always let the Bible be your authority.

**“He who glories, let him glory in the Lord”
– 1 Corinthians 1:31**

Abbreviations Used in These Notes

ASV – American Standard Version

b/c/v – book, chapter, and verse

ESV – English Standard Version

f – the following verse

ff – the following verses

KJV – King James Version

NASB – New American Standard Bible

NEB – New English Bible

NIV – New International Version

NKJV – New King James Version

RSV – Revised Standard Version

Introduction to the Book of Acts

Helpful tools for study

The following tools will be helpful in this study. Most can be obtained from a good religious bookstore.

1. A good study Bible

We recommend the following features:

- * NKJV, KJV, ASV, or NASB. (We do not recommend loose translations or one-man translations.)
- * Good cross-references.
- * A good binding, preferably genuine leather.

2. A good analytical or exhaustive concordance

We recommend one of the following:

- * Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, or
- * Young's Analytical Concordance

A shorter abridged concordance may work, but will not contain all the words or all the references you may need.

Some computer software or websites provide good Bible concordance and search routines.

3. Other useful books

The following books may be helpful, but are not as essential as the previous materials.

- * *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, by W. E. Vine
- * Bible Dictionary, such as *New International Dictionary of the Bible* by Zondervan's or *New Smith's Bible Dictionary*

Basic Facts about Acts

Author

The book nowhere directly states what man recorded the inspired words. However, it is generally agreed to be the work of Luke for the following reasons:

(1) The author of Acts had written a “former account” of the life of Jesus (1:1,2). This would indicate it was Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John.

(2) Both Acts and Luke are addressed to “Theophilus” (“lover of God” – compare Luke 1:1-4 to Acts 1:1). The introductions are similar in other ways as well.

(3) Acts, in the original language, contains several terms which were characteristically used by physicians, and Luke was a physician (Colossians 4:14).

(4) The text passes from third person (“they”) to first person (“we”) and back again repeatedly when describing some of Paul’s travels. These changes would indicate that the author was one of Paul’s traveling companions, which Luke was (Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philem. 24). Further, the author does not name himself but uses “we.” So it appears that the author is a traveling companion who is nowhere named in Acts. The companions other than Luke are nearly all named in Acts, so this also seems to confirm that Luke was the author. Also, the changes in person logically agree with the times when Luke seems to join or leave the group. (Ex.: Acts 16:6-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:2-28:16).

Horne states:

That Saint Luke was the author of the Acts of the Apostles, as well as of the Gospel which bears his name, is evident both from the introduction, and from the unanimous testimonies of the early Christians. ... To the genuineness and authenticity of this book, the early Christian fathers bear unanimous testimony.

Theme

Acts is a history of the early church and of the spread of the gospel (note 1:8). It is not a record of all of the acts of all of the apostles, but of just some of the acts of some of the apostles.

Date

The book ends with Paul in prison in Rome for the first time. His subsequent history is not recorded, which would indicate the book was written before that history was known. This would date it about 62-64 AD.

Summary by Sections (see Acts 1:8)

The spread of the gospel in Jerusalem (chapters 1-7)

The spread of the gospel in Judea & Samaria (chapters 8-12)

The spread of the gospel throughout the earth (chapters 13-28)

Benefits of studying this history

1. It gives examples of people who were converted to Jesus and of those who were not converted. Since God is no respecter of person (Acts 10:34,35), we can put ourselves in the place of these people and learn from their examples what is necessary for a person to be converted and why people sometimes are not converted.

2. It gives evidence that Jesus is the Christ and the gospel is the true revelation of God's will for our time. We learn proofs that support our own faith and that we can use to convert others.

(a) Jews believed in God and the Old Testament, but needed to be persuaded to accept Jesus and the gospel. Acts shows the kind of evidence that can be presented to convert Jews to Jesus.

(b) Gentiles did not know the true God, so they needed to come to know not only Jesus but also God. Again, Acts shows the kind of evidence that should be given to those who do not even know the true God to convert them according to the gospel.

3. It gives us explanations of the work of the Holy Spirit through the apostles. This helps us understand Holy Spirit baptism, prophecy, miracles, laying on of apostles' hands, etc. In so doing, it helps us see the contrast to the false claims of people today who say they have the same power that the apostles had.

4. It teaches many basic gospel truths about worship and the church (names, organization, origin, etc.)

5. It gives excellent examples that show us how to teach the gospel to others – excellent teaching methods, attitudes, how to deal with opposition, etc.

Summary of Main Events in Acts

Listed below are major events found in Acts. Given a list containing any of these events, the student should be able to put them in historical order. Another useful exercise would be to learn which chapter each event is recorded in.

Jesus' ascension – 1:9-11

The appointment of Matthias – 1:15-26

Coming of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of the church – chapter 2

Healing of the lame man at the temple gate – chapter 3

Death of Ananias & Sapphira – 5:1-11

Selection of 7 men to serve needy widows – 6:1-6

Stephen's sermon and death – chapter 7

Conversion of the Samaritans and of Simon the Sorcerer – 8:4-25

Conversion of the Ethiopian treasurer – 8:26-40

Conversion of Saul – 9:1-31

Raising of Dorcas from the dead – 9:36-43

Conversion of Cornelius (first Gentile convert) – chapter 10

Establishment of the church in Antioch – 11:19-30

Death of James & imprisonment of Peter – chapter 12

Beginning of Paul's first preaching trip; Conversion of Sergius Paulus – 13:1-12

Paul honored as a god, but then stoned at Lystra – 14:8-20

Discussion of circumcision at Jerusalem – chapter 15

Conversion of Lydia; Conversion of Philippian Jailer – chapter 16

Paul's speech on Mars Hill – 17:16-34

Apollos corrected by Aquila & Priscilla – 18:24-28

Riot at Ephesus – chapter 19

Paul's message to the Ephesian elders – chapter 20

Paul's arrest in the temple – chapter 21

Paul's defense to the riotous mob in Jerusalem – chapter 22

Paul's defense before the Jewish council in Jerusalem – chapter 23

Paul's defense before Felix – chapter 24

Paul's defense before Festus – chapter 25

Paul's defense before Agrippa – chapter 26

Voyage to Rome – chapter 27 & 28

Definitions of Important Words in Acts

The student should be able to define the following words:

“alms” – a donation to the poor or needy.

“altar” – a place where religious rites are performed or offerings made to a god.

“apostle” – one who is sent forth to accomplish a mission; especially the men Jesus chose and sent forth to be eyewitnesses of His resurrection.

“barbarian” – one who does not know Greek language and/or culture.

“bishop” – one who oversees a local church (same office as elder).

“blaspheme” – to revile or speak against something, esp. God or sacred things.

“centurion” – captain over 100 soldiers.

“Christian” – a person who is Christlike, a disciple or adherent of Christ.

“conscience” – the inner sense by which one knows whether or not he is practicing what he believes to be right.

“covenant” – an agreement or solemn obligation.

“disciple” – a follower or learner.

“dispute” – debate, contend.

“divination” or “soothsaying” – prediction of the future by means of occult powers (not from God).

“edify” – build up or strengthen.

“elder” – an older man appointed (with one or more others) to oversee a local church.

“evangelist” – one who preaches the gospel.

“exorcist” – one who casts out demons.

“fast” – abstinence from food.

“grace” – undeserved favor.

“in the name of” – by the authority or power of; in accordance with the will of; acting on behalf of.

“justify” – to count as just or righteous.

“minister” – servant, one who follows someone else’s directions.

“Passover” (“Feast of Unleavened Bread”) – a Jewish feast in memory of God’s freeing Israel from Egypt.

“pastor” – one who shepherds a local church (same office as elder).

“patriarch” – the ruler or father of a family or tribe.

“Pentecost” – a Jewish feast occurring “fifty days” after Passover.

“prayer” – man speaking to God.

“prophet” – one who speaks God’s will by direct guidance of the Holy Spirit.

“remission” – forgiveness or pardon.

“repent” – to change one’s mind; especially to decide to quit living in sin and to start living for God.

“respect of persons” – partiality; favoritism; unfair discrimination.

“sanctified” – holy, set apart, dedicated to God’s service.

“score” – twenty.

“scourge” – to beat with a whip of small cords.

“sect” – heresy, denomination, faction based on perverted teachings.

“sedition” – insurrection, treason, rebellion against rulers.

“sorcery” – witchcraft, magic, the practice of exercising supernatural occult power (such as evil spirits, appeals to the spirits of dead men, etc.).

“synagogue” – worship assembly of Jews (or the place where they met).

“temperance” – self-control in doing what is right.

“vision” – a direct revelation by means of something miraculously seen.

“witness” – one who testifies about what he has personally seen or heard.

Summary of Important Places in Acts

The student should be able to locate these places on a map; for each place Paul visited on his missionary journeys, the student should also be able to tell which journey Paul it was in which Paul visited that place.

Miscellaneous Places Mentioned

Antioch (of Syria) – 11:19-30
Caesarea – 8:40; 9:30; 10:1-11:18
Cyprus – 11:19
Damascus – 9:2-25
Galilee – 1:11; 9:31
Gaza – 8:26ff
Jerusalem – see chap 1-7, etc., etc.
Judea – 1:8; 8:1; 9:31
Lydda & Joppa – 9:32-43
Phoenicia – 11:19
Samaria – 1:8; 8:1,4-25; 9:31
Tarsus – 9:11,30
Tyre & Sidon – 12:20

Paul's First Preaching Journey

Antioch – 13:1-3
Seleucia – 13:4
Cyprus – 13:7-12
Salamis – 13:5
Paphos – 13:6-12
Perga in Pamphylia – 13:13
Antioch of Pisidia – 13:14-52
Iconium – 13:51-14:6
Lystra – 14:6-20
Derbe – 14:20f
Lystra, Iconium, Antioch (return) – 14:21-23
Perga – 14:25
Attalia – 14:25
Antioch – 14:26-28

Paul's Second Preaching Journey

Antioch – 15:35
Derbe & Lystra (in Syria & Cilicia) – 15:41; 16:1
Phrygia & Galatia – 16:6
Troas – 16:9-11
Samothrace – 16:11
Neapolis – 16:11

Philippi in Macedonia – 16:9-12ff
Amphipolis – 17:1
Apollonia – 17:1
Thessalonica – 17:1-9
Berea – 17:10-15
Athens – 17:16-34
Corinth – 18:1-17
Cenchrea – 18:18
Ephesus – 18:19-21
Caesarea, Jerusalem, Antioch – 18:22

Paul's Third Preaching Journey

Antioch – 18:22f
Galatia & Phrygia – 18:23
Ephesus – chapter 19
Macedonia, Achaia, Macedonia (again) – 20:1-3
Philippi – 20:6
Troas – 20:6-12
Assos, Mitylene, Chios, Samos, Trogyllium – 20:13-15
Miletus – 20:15-38
Coos, Rhodes, Patara, Cyprus, Tyre, Ptolemais, Caesarea – 21:1-16
Jerusalem – 21:17ff

Paul's Journey to Rome

Jerusalem – chapter 21-23
Caesarea – chapter 24-26
Sidon – 27:3
Cyprus – 27:4
Myra of Lycia – 27:5
Cnidus – 27:7
Salmone – 27:7
Crete – 27:7
Fair Havens – 27:8
Cauda – 27:16
Melita – 28:1
Syracuse – 28:12
Rhegium – 28:13
Puteoli – 28:13
Market of Appius, Three Taverns – 28:15
Rome 28:16ff

Summary of Conversions in Acts

The student should be able to answer basic questions about each example of the main conversions discussed in Acts, and should be able to indicate what people did to be forgiven of sins.

People	Hear	Believe	Re-pent	Con-fess	Bap-tism	Result
Jews (Acts 2)	verses 14-41	(v36)	v38		verses 38,41	Remission (v38)
Samaritans (Acts 8)	verses 5,12	verses 12,13			verses 12,13	Saved (Mark 16:16)
Treasurer (Acts 8)	v35	v37		v37	verses 38,39	Rejoicing (v39)
Saul (Acts 9,22)	9:6				9:18 22:16	Sins washed away (22:16)
Cornelius (Acts 10,11)	11:14	10:43	11:18		10: 47,48	Saved (11:14)
Lydia (Acts 16)	16:13f				16:15	
Jailer (Acts 16)	16:31f	16:31, 34			16:33	Rejoicing (16:34)
Corinthians (Acts 18)	18:8	18:8			18:8	

Other Major Doctrines in Acts

The church

- Names or designations
- Importance
- Organization
- Work
- Origin or beginning

Work of the Holy Spirit

- Revelation of the gospel to inspired men
- Holy Spirit baptism
- Miracles and signs
- Laying on of apostles' hands
- Indwelling of the Holy Spirit

Qualifications and work of apostles

- Chosen by Jesus

Eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ
Miracles, Holy Spirit baptism, laying on of hands (see Holy Spirit
above)

Evidences for Jesus and the Gospel

Resurrection

Miracles

Fulfilled prophecy

Part 1: The Spread of the Gospel in Jerusalem – Chapters 1-7

Acts 1

Preparations for the Beginning of the Church – Chapter 1

1:1-8 - Promise of the Coming of the Holy Spirit and the Beginning of the Kingdom

1:1,2 – The author had previously written an account of Jesus' life.

The inspired writer of Acts here introduces his book by telling us that he had written a former account (treatise) of Jesus' life and teachings until the time of His ascension into heaven (compare the introduction of Acts to Luke 1:1-4). This is exactly the extent of the gospel of Luke, which concludes when Jesus ascended after He had instructed the apostles to preach to all the world (Luke 24).

Acts, like Luke, is addressed to “Theophilus” (literally meaning “lover of God”). This could be the name of a particular individual, or it could simply be a general term for any of God's people. The fact both Luke and Acts were so addressed indicates both were written by the same author (see introductory notes).

Jesus gave commandment to the apostles He had chosen. The commandment here most likely refers to the giving of the Great Commission, which is the commandment recorded that Jesus gave just before He ascended (Luke 24). It is also alluded to in Acts 1:8 just before the account

there of His ascension (verses 9-11). It is an appropriate starting point for the book of Acts, since the book records the work of preaching which the apostles did in response to the Great Commission.

“Apostle” means “one sent forth on a mission.” The mission and who did the sending depends on the context. But in the New Testament, and the book of Acts in particular, it most generally (but not always) refers to the men chosen by Jesus and sent forth to preach the gospel and especially to bear testimony to the resurrection. The work of these men is largely what Acts is all about, so we will study more about their work and qualifications as the book proceeds.

Note that the apostles were chosen by Jesus’ Himself. He is the one who “sent” them on the mission, authorizing their work. They did not assume the office by their own choice, nor were they chosen by majority vote or political maneuvering, as is the case with some today who claim to be successors to the apostles. They did not claim the office without proof that Jesus had put them there. There was always clear evidence that Jesus Himself had personally chosen each individual who received the office (compare 1:15-26 and the notes there).

1:3 – In the presence of His apostles, Jesus presented Himself alive by many infallible proofs for forty days.

After His death (suffering), Jesus appeared to his apostles (and others) convincingly demonstrating that He was alive again. These appearances are recorded in Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20,21, 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, and well as here in Acts 1 and in Acts 9,22,26.

The resurrection is the greatest single evidence of the truth of Jesus’ teaching (compare Romans 1:4). That He really did come back to life is established on the testimony of many witnesses recorded in the Scriptures. In addition, God gave the witness of the empty tomb: where did the body go? The enemies of Jesus recognized the force of this argument in attempting to give a rationalization for it (Matthew 28:11ff), but their answer is totally inadequate (see notes on Matthew 28).

The Christian’s faith is not based on hearsay, legend, speculation, ignorance, family religion, prejudice, or gullibility. It is based on solid evidence that would stand up in any honest courtroom and convince any honest heart. Indeed there are “many infallible proofs.”

These appearances occurred over a period of forty days. There were not just one or two appearances lasting a few moments, but many appearances that occurred before many different witnesses over a long period of time. These were repeated under many different circumstances and gave the witnesses time to handle Jesus’ body, discuss with Him, eat with Him, listen to His instruction, and thereby establish beyond doubt that it was really Jesus who was alive before them. One of the main themes of Acts is to repeatedly present the testimony of those who had seen Jesus alive and served as witnesses that He had been raised.

He also spoke to them about things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

This had been a major theme of His teaching during His ministry, as it had been for John the Baptist and for Jesus' disciples when they were sent to preach (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; 10:5-7). This is necessarily so because it is a fundamental part of the gospel (Mark 1:14,15; Acts 8:12). Furthermore, the disciples still did not understand Jesus' teaching on the subject (verse 6). It is not surprising, therefore, for Him to return to this theme.

Yet if this was a major theme of His preaching and He here continued that theme, it is hardly likely that He was here preaching about a different kingdom or one to come at a different time than He originally intended. He came to set up His kingdom, He was here still speaking of the same kingdom, and the disciples are about to ask Him when it will begin (see verses 6-8). If Jesus originally had been preaching about His kingdom, but now has changed to refer to the church or to a different kingdom to come at a different time, there is no evidence of it. This confirms that premillennial thinking errs in claiming that Jesus came to establish an earthly kingdom but failed, so He established the church instead and now intends to wait till His second coming to establish the kingdom that He originally intended to set up the first time He came.

1:4,5 – Jesus repeated the promise that they would be baptized in the Holy Spirit.

On this occasion when He was with the apostles, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem (compare Luke 24:49,52). Some of His appearances had been in Galilee (Matthew 28), but this one was in the vicinity of Jerusalem. He ascended from the Mount of Olives (verse 12).

He had definite plans for them, and this required that they be in Jerusalem to begin their work there (compare verse 8). This was necessary in order to fulfill prophecy (Isaiah 2:3). The disciples obeyed this command and did stay in Jerusalem till they received the Holy Spirit – 1:12; 2:1,5; Luke 24:52.

They were to wait in the city to receive that which the Father had promised and which Jesus had told them of. The promise was that they would be baptized in the Holy Spirit, in contrast to the baptism in water practiced by John. And all of this would happen soon – not many days from the time Jesus was speaking to them.

The time element went like this:

Events	Time Elapsed	Total Time
From Jesus' death on Passover to Jesus' resurrection on the first day of the week	3 days	50 days

Jesus' appearances	40 days	
From Jesus' ascension to the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost	Not many days	

Jesus' promise here is a repetition of the promise John the Baptist had made (Matthew 3:11; John 1:33; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16). Holy Spirit **baptism** is mentioned by that name in the book of Acts only in Acts 11:16 and this passage. The events referred to in Acts 2 and Acts 10 fit the description given here and are the only events in Acts that do. Yet some people talk as if it happened to every new convert in Acts. (See also John 14:26; 16:3-8; etc.)

Notice that Holy Spirit baptism was a promise, not a command. And it was not a baptism in water like John's baptism was. Further, this promise was here addressed to the apostles (verse 2), not to mankind in general nor even to every Christian. (This does not prove no one else could get it. If God determined to give it to others, He could of course do so. And He did do so with Cornelius – Acts 10. But this passage cannot be used, as some do, to claim a promise of Holy Spirit baptism to all Christians.) Further, it would happen “not many days” after the event here described.

Verses 2-8 here give much important and useful information about Holy Spirit baptism. It is especially helpful in showing that Holy Spirit baptism was not for all people and was not the baptism that men must receive to be saved. Note the contrast:

Holy Spirit Baptism	Baptism for Salvation
Promise (v4)	Command (Mark 16:16; Ax 22:16)
To certain people (verses 2-5)	To all men (Mark 16:15,16)
Wait for God's time (verses 4,6)	Do not wait (Acts 2:38,41; 22:16)
Wait in Jerusalem (v4)	In the whole world (Mark 16:15f)
Gave miraculous power (v8)	For forgiveness (Acts 2:38; 22:16)
Administrator: Jesus (Mat 3:11)	Administrator: men (Matthew 28:19)
Not water baptism (v5)	Water baptism (Acts 8:35-39)

This contrast shows clearly that separate baptisms are involved. Holy Spirit baptism was different from water baptism (verse 5) – they are two separate baptisms. Further, Holy Spirit baptism was different from the baptism that was essential to salvation, as the chart above shows. The water baptism of the gospel in every respect fits the baptism necessary to salvation. It is a baptism that every person on earth must receive. But the Holy Spirit baptism was a different baptism and was for only a few to achieve a limited purpose.

Ephesians 4:4-6 shows that today there is only one baptism just as there is only one God and Father. Since water baptism is essential for salvation, it must be the one baptism that continues today. Holy Spirit baptism, though practiced in Acts, had ceased by the time Ephesians was written.

1:6,7 – When the apostles asked when the kingdom would come, Jesus said this was not for them to know.

The eleven were beginning to understand the concept of Jesus' death and resurrection, but they had not understood it until after it had happened. In a similar way at this point they were still having trouble understanding the nature of the kingdom and did not understand that till after it came. They were still looking for Jesus to set up a kingdom for physical Israel. It is likely they expected that, having come back to life, Jesus was now ready to establish His earthly kingdom and reign in Jerusalem, etc. (compare John 6:15 to John 18:36).

Jesus had taught about the kingdom from the beginning of His ministry on (verse 3), so the disciples knew it was important and they seemed to sense that important things were about to happen regarding it. But they did not see the proper relationship between the nation of Israel and that kingdom (see notes on verse 8; compare Luke 17:20,21; 19:11; John 18:36,37; Mark 9:1; Matthew 16:18,19).

They asked if the kingdom would be restored to Israel at that time, but Jesus said it was not for them to know when the kingdom would be set up. This was in the control of the Father.

However, though He would not tell them specifically when this would happen, He did give information which, properly understood, would give them at least some idea of when this would happen. He follows up His answer by telling them they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came (verse 8). But He had already told them the kingdom would come when the power came (Mark 9:1), and that the Holy Spirit would come "not many days hence" (verse 5). This was fulfilled on Pentecost in Acts 2, clearly fulfilling all prophecies of the beginning of the kingdom.

It is interesting today that many people think the kingdom has not yet come, and many think they can tell you when it will come. They are wrong on both counts. It has now come, as we will see. But at the time when it had not come, not even the apostles knew when it would come! If it still has not come, how could anybody know when it would come?

1:8 – When the Holy Spirit came, they would receive power to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and the whole world.

Jesus had promised the apostles that they would receive Holy Spirit baptism (see notes on verses 4,5). In response to their question about the kingdom, He proceeded to tell them that the Holy Spirit, when it

came, would give them power. The only information given about the nature of this power is that it would enable them to testify about Jesus.

In saying this, however, Jesus gave major information about the kingdom, had the apostles understood it. In Mark 9:1 He had told them the kingdom would come with power, and that it would come in the lifetime of the disciples. Here in Acts 1:8, discussing the coming of the kingdom, He told them the power would come when the Spirit came, and that would happen in Jerusalem (verse 4) “not many days hence” (verse 5). Clearly the kingdom would come at the same time that the power and the Spirit came, and that would happen “not many days hence” in Jerusalem in the lifetime of the apostles. (Compare Luke 24:48,49)

Those today, who say the kingdom still has not come, need to reckon with these verses. If the kingdom still has not come today, how could it come in the lifetime of the apostles and “not many days hence” after Jesus made these statements? In fact, the kingdom did come in their lifetime as proved by Colossians 1:13; 1 Corinthians 15:21-16; Revelation 1:9; Hebrews 12:28; etc. We will in fact see the fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

The power of the Spirit would enable them to serve as witnesses.

A “witness” is someone who testifies of what he has seen, heard, or otherwise personally experienced with his own physical senses. The apostles had been chosen especially by Jesus to serve as witnesses of His work, especially of the fact that He had been raised from the dead (see notes on 1:21,22; compare Luke 24:48; John 15:27; Acts 2:32; 3:15; 10:40-42; 1 John 1:1-4).

We will see that throughout the book of Acts they repeatedly bore their testimony. Jesus was here promising them that they would be guided by the Holy Spirit as they did this. Our faith rests on their testimony, because it is by that evidence that we can know Jesus was raised as the Son of God (John 20:30,31; compare Acts 1:3; etc.).

Consider further that we are here informed what purpose the Holy Spirit baptism would serve for the apostles. It would give them power. The context and application shows that this was supernatural power – the power of spiritual gifts. They would be guided directly by the Holy Spirit as they taught about Jesus, miraculously guided to know the truth of the gospel to preach (John 16:13; Matthew 10:19,20). They would also have the power to confirm by miracles that their testimony really was from God (Acts 14:3; Mark 16:17-20). The apostles would need this power in order to know what to say and to prove their message was from God, so they were not to start till they had the power.

Note how important the work of bearing witness is in God’s plan. God intended for men to have solid evidence on which to base their faith that Jesus is God’s Son and that the gospel is truly from God (compare verse 3). Our faith is not based on gullibility or accepting our parents’

beliefs, etc. The evidence requires eyewitnesses who testify of Jesus' miracles, especially His resurrection, as well as eyewitnesses who testify of the miracles of His inspired apostles and prophets.

It is a perversion of Bible teaching to teach, as some do, that all saved people will receive miraculous powers of the Holy Spirit to confirm that they have been saved. The purpose of the power was, not to prove to the one who had it that he had been saved, but to enable Him to preach the message to *others* and to confirm to others that the message was from God so that the *hearers* could believe the message and be saved (John 20:30,31). If every person was to receive a personal manifestation of the Spirit's power to tell him how to be saved or to prove to him that he had been saved, why would anyone need the testimony of the apostles?

This shows that no man today can "give testimony" as the apostles did. Some people talk about "giving their testimony for the Lord"; some even try to use passages like this one as reason why they do it. But they cannot do as the apostles did, because they have never personally seen the Lord and physically experienced Him alive to testify that He was raised from the dead. What they do is tell about how they were, they think, "converted." This is not "testifying" as the apostles did.

Jesus summarizes the areas where the gospel would be preached.

Jesus here also predicts the geographical order in which the gospel would be spread: first Jerusalem, then Judea, then Samaria, then the uttermost parts of the earth. This is exactly the order in which it occurred. ***As a result, this verse serves as a basic statement of the theme of Acts and an outline of the contents of the book.***

The gospel was first preached in Jerusalem because it had been so prophesied (Isaiah 2:2,3), and also because God had worked to prepare the Jews to receive the gospel, Jerusalem being the center of Jewish worship (Galatians 3:24,25). God had sent the Jews His Law and prophets, and Jesus Himself had taught among them to prepare them for the gospel. Many of them still ended up rejecting the gospel, yet they gave the gospel an opportunity for a good beginning when 3000 of them obeyed the first day it was preached. From then on, in virtually every city where the gospel was preached, it went first to the Jews and gave a starting point for the gospel.

Finally note that this statement, like the Great Commission itself, shows that the gospel was for Gentiles as well as Jews: men in the uttermost parts of the earth (compare Mark 16:15; Matthew 18:19; Luke 24:47). But the apostles misunderstood this as we have seen they misunderstood many other statements of Jesus. And again it was only later that they realized the full impact of the statements.

1:9-11 - Jesus' Ascension

1:9 – In the presence of the apostles, Jesus was taken up and received by a cloud.

Compare Luke 24:50-53; Mark 16:19. See also John 20:17; 6:62. Clouds have been symbolic of God's presence various times in the Bible: a cloud led Israel in the wilderness, God's presence in the tabernacle was symbolized by a cloud, God spoke from a cloud at the transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17), etc.

1:10,11 – Two men in white apparel said Jesus would come again as He went.

The two men were obviously angels (compare Luke 24:4; John 20:12). Jesus went into heaven received by a cloud. He will come again in heaven in the clouds (1 Thessalonians 4:17; Revelation 1:7).

The personal return of Jesus is a frequent gospel topic. All Christians believe He will return, raise the dead, and judge all men. But when this will happen is nowhere stated here or elsewhere. See Matthew 25:31-46; John 12:48; Acts 1:9-11; 10:42; 17:30,31; Romans 2:4-11; 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-9; 2 Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 9:27; 10:26-31; Revelation 20:11-15; Ecclesiastes 12:13,14.

The ascension is another great miracle proving Jesus was from God and taught the truth. It is significant that this miracle, like others of Jesus, was not a matter of legend or hearsay that someone thought may have happened. Eleven men all at once personally "were looking" when this occurred.

And since the He will "come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven," it follows that His second coming will be visible. The idea of an invisible return, as taught by some, is contradicted by the statement of the angels themselves. "Every eye will see Him" (Revelation 1:7). We will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ – 2 Corinthians 5:10.

Note that the ascension took place from the vicinity of the Mount of Olives (verse 12), which was near Bethany (Luke 24:50-53). It occurred some forty days after the resurrection (1:3).

It is interesting that the angels addressed the apostles as "men of Galilee." Remember this point, because it will serve to help identify those who receive Holy Spirit baptism in Acts 2 (compare 2:7).

Mark 16:19 says that, when Jesus was received into Heaven, He sat down at the right hand of God. But this is where He was to reign as King and serve as priest (Psalms 110:1-4). If He is at the right hand of God, He must be priest and king. And this tells us when He began to so reign – when He ascended to the Father.

1:12-26 - Selection of a Replacement for Judas

1:12-14 – The apostles returned to Jerusalem as instructed.

After Jesus' ascension, the disciples returned to Jerusalem as Jesus had commanded them, telling them to wait for the power of the Spirit (1:4,5,8). The fact they returned from the Mount of Olives indicates that Jesus had ascended from there or near there. Luke 24:50,51 indicates that Jesus led them out as far as Bethany and then ascended. Stringer points out this may mean in the vicinity or in the direction of Bethany. Or perhaps He ascended from Bethany, but they crossed the Mount of Olives on the way home.

A "Sabbath day's journey" was less than a mile, according to Jewish tradition. This was nowhere defined in the law, but was the distance that Jews had established that one could travel without violating the Sabbath law. It is used here as a simple way to indicate distance.

The eleven apostles are then listed. (Note that there are only eleven because, as we will see, Judas had killed himself and had not yet been replaced.) In view of the important work to be done by the apostles, it is appropriate that Luke named them here. They are the "apostles" or the "eleven," showing they had a special call as apostles, separating them from the disciples. Some people mistakenly use the word "apostle" as if everyone in the context, all 120, were apostles! (Compare 1:2,26.)

With the apostles were some of the women (compare Luke 23:49-55; 8:1-3), including Jesus' mother Mary, and also His brothers. This surely appears to be a clear reference to His physical brothers (but some claim these were spiritual brothers other than the apostles – compare verse 15). They had been slow to accept Jesus' claims (John 7), but had now apparently come to believe.

These continued together in prayer. McGarvey observes that, according to Luke 24:52,53, the prayer, etc., occurred in the temple, not in the upper chamber where the apostles were abiding.

1:15-17 – Peter reminded them about Judas' betrayal.

The following events must have occurred on one of the days intervening between Jesus' ascension and Pentecost (this was a period of 7-10 days, since Pentecost was fifty days after the Passover, and Jesus appeared for forty days before He ascended).

A multitude of about 120 disciples were assembled, and Peter suggested replacing Judas, who had betrayed Jesus by guiding those who arrested Him. He plainly stated that Judas had possessed a portion in the ministry. He was therefore, an apostle as well as a disciple.

The number 120 was only those gathered at this occasion: the apostles and some others with them. McGarvey points out that this does not mean there were no other disciples. Only the apostles had been commanded to wait in Jerusalem. But the others chose to wait with them.

Jesus appeared after His resurrection to over 500 brethren at once (1 Corinthians 15:6), so there must have been more than 120 total.

“The Holy Spirit spoke by the mouth of David” confirms the Biblical teaching of verbal inspiration of the Scriptures.

1:18,19 – Judas had committed suicide and a field was purchased with a betrayal price that had been given him.

These verses may be Peter’s words or they may be an interjection by Luke to explain to readers why Judas had died and needed to be replaced. Peter might have stated it on this occasion, but would not have needed to, since his hearers would already have known it. Nor would Peter have needed to translate for those people the meaning of the name given to the field in their own language. But Luke would need to make sure we, who were not there, understood.

Judas “purchased a field,” not in that he personally made the transaction, but his money was what was used to pay for the field. The Jewish rulers actually carried out the transaction (Matthew 26:14-16; 47:5-6; 27:3-10).

Luke says Judas “fell headlong,” but Matthew 27:5 says he hanged himself. Probably both happened: he hung himself, perhaps by jumping off a wall or cliff, then eventually the rope or limb broke or for some other unstated reason he fell headlong.

He burst open in the middle (i.e., the middle of his body, not the middle of the field), and his bowels gushed out. As a result, the field bought with blood money was from then on called the “field of blood” (compare Matthew 27:4,6,8).

Here then is the death of the one who had betrayed Jesus. In remorse for his sin he returned the money and went out and hanged himself. The money was then used to purchase a cemetery for strangers.

1:20 – Peter cited passages from the Psalms as evidence that Judas should be replaced.

Peter’s conclusion that Judas should be replaced was based on two Old Testament passages – Psalm 69:25 and 109:8. It does not appear obvious from the context of the passages that they were referring to Judas. Perhaps Peter understood them this way because Jesus had explained these prophecies to the eleven after His resurrection (Luke 24:27,44-48). Or perhaps this is not so much a direct prophecy in the passages as a general principle or example which Peter by inspiration applies to Judas’ case.

In any case, Peter’s example shows that we can and should base our practice on the Scriptures, even though they are hundreds of years old and were directly addressed to other people. It also shows how the Old Testament prophecies help us understand New Testament practices, for Peter had said this action should be taken because of what the Old Testament had prophesied (verse 16).

The passage Peter quotes states, regarding this one who betrayed Jesus, that his habitation would be desolate and someone else would take his office (ASV footnote: “overseership”). This word comes from the word for “bishop” or overseer. It shows that the work of apostles was not just that of witnessing and preaching but also that of overseeing the early church. Later this work was given to elders in the local churches – 20:28.

Since this action occurred before the apostles were baptized in the Spirit (chapter 2), some have wondered whether the apostles were right in this action. Peter, however, cites the authority of the Old Testament. It could still be argued, however, that God had intended some other means of choosing the one to take Judas’ place (such as Paul). Consider:

- * The prophecy showed Judas would be replaced.

- * Jesus had explained the prophecies to the apostles (see above).

- * The apostles had already received some form of guidance of the Spirit, even if not the baptism (Matthew 10; etc.).

- * Had the apostles erred in this, when the Holy Spirit did come He would surely have corrected them for the error. Instead, Matthias was counted among the apostles, making twelve of them. These twelve – including Matthias – received Holy Spirit baptism and worked together as apostles – 1:26; 2:14; 6:2 (compare 2:42; 4:35; 5:12; etc.).

In 1 Corinthians 15:5,7,8, Paul distinguished himself from the “twelve” “apostles.” Note also there would be apostles on twelve thrones, but surely Judas was not included (Matthew 19:28). Just as the coming of the Holy Spirit on Cornelius’ household in Acts 10 confirmed Peter’s decision to teach and baptize them, so the coming of the Holy Spirit on Matthias confirms the decision of the other apostles that he should become an apostle.

- * The method of prayer and casting lots was a common method for inspired men to ask God to reveal His will.

I conclude that the event here conformed fully to God’s intent. Apparently Jesus had appointed twelve because He wanted twelve to be present from the beginning of the work of witnessing, spreading the gospel, and guiding the early church.

1:21,22 – One would be chosen to be a witness with the apostles of the resurrection.

This reveals very important information about the qualifications of apostles. Peter plainly states that their main job was to be witnesses of the resurrection (compare 1:8; 2:32; 3:15; Luke 24:48; John 15:27; etc. – see introductory notes). They also had responsibilities as prophets or spokesmen to reveal God’s will by direct inspiration and also to serve as guides in the early church. But others served as prophets and others served as leaders in the early church. The main, unique duty of apostles was to go everywhere giving personal testimony of what they had seen and heard and handled as evidence that Jesus was risen (compare 1 John 1:1-5).

To do this, an apostle had to be an eyewitness of Jesus after His resurrection (1 Corinthians 9:1; Acts chapter 9,22,26). In particular, it is here stated that he must have associated with Jesus from the time John was baptizing till the time of the ascension. This would give assurance that the men had ample opportunity to be trustworthy witnesses.

Note that, since no men today can have these qualifications, we can have no apostles living on earth in the church today. As Coffman points out, there can be no “successor” to a witness. One is either a witness as a result of his own experience, or he is not a witness at all. He cannot be appointed to succeed someone else as a witness if he himself is not a witness. Since the apostles had to be witnesses, to speak of successors to the apostles is nonsense. This destroys the concept of the Catholic Popes and Mormon apostles as successors to the apostles.

It was never God’s intent for there to be apostles living on earth or successors to the apostles throughout the ages, any more than He intended for Jesus to continue living forever on earth. He did, however, want twelve at the beginning. Since that time, we “have” the apostles in the same sense that people in Jesus’ day “had” Moses and the prophets (Luke 16:29-31). We have the results of the work they did, which results were intended by God to be permanent. The apostles revealed the written word, which word is to live and abide forever (1 Peter 1:22-25). We no more need apostles on earth today than we need Jesus on earth today.

Note: Paul was an eyewitness of Jesus after His resurrection. He may have had contact with Jesus throughout the period described in these verses, but that is not likely. It is more likely that Paul was a Divinely appointed exception in that he did not see Jesus throughout His lifetime. This could be the sense in which he was “born out of due time” (1 Corinthians 15:8,9). Nevertheless, he did see Jesus after His resurrection and could serve in that primary role of an apostle.

There are other evidences as well that men today cannot serve as apostles (see introductory notes).

1:23-26 – The Lord indicated by means of a lot that Matthias should be chosen and numbered with the other apostles.

The group then found two men who met the necessary qualifications: Joseph Barsabas and Matthias. That these were the only two present who met the qualifications seems clear from the fact that only two were “proposed.” Had there been more, how could the apostles be sure these two were the only ones God might want? Furthermore, if only two men met the qualifications immediately following Jesus’ death and resurrection, how could more than that meet the qualifications 2000 years later!?

Before a decision was made, they prayed about it. The choice was indicated by casting lots, but it was God who actually made the choice. Note that there was no vote taken as some do today claiming they are

choosing a successor to the apostles. The people asked in prayer that God use the lot to indicate which one God had chosen.

Lots were commonly cast in the Old Testament as a means of God's revealing His will (Leviticus 16:8; Joshua 14:2; 1 Samuel 14:41,42; Nehemiah 10:34; 11:1; Proverbs 16:33). The method involved some chance event (like we might "draw straws"), but it was used by God to reveal His will. The method cannot be used today to reveal God's will, however, because God does not reveal His will directly today. He has revealed all His will in the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16,17). To reveal His will by lot or other direct means would be to exercise miracles, a power which we will see has ceased (1 Corinthians 13:8-11). This serves as further proof there are no apostles living on earth or successors of the apostles, for there is no way for God to indicate directly whom He wants as apostle.

The expression "You have chosen" shows that the choice had already been made by God. The disciples did not make the choice, nor was it a matter of chance. God's mind was already decided. The apostles just asked Him to reveal what He had already decided. This shows clearly that they did not believe their own actions determined whom He chose.

Furthermore, they explained that God was the only one to properly make the choice, because He knew the hearts of all men. This expresses one of the unique powers of Deity. Men cannot know the hearts of other men without some other information – 1 Kings 8:39; 1 Corinthians 2:11. This also proves that God made the choice, and that only God could make the choice. No mere men could take a vote, based on their human wisdom, and choose a "successor" to the apostles. Such a choice required direct Divine revelation – a power which no longer is granted to men.

"To go to his own place" ("to go where he belongs" – NIV) does not mean Judas was unconditionally predestined to be lost and had no choice about it. He chose his own course. But once he had made his choice, he deserved the reward he eventually got – he went where he belonged.

The lot fell on Matthias and he was numbered with the other eleven apostles.

Note that these apostles were the ones who received the Holy Spirit baptism as the story continues into chapter 2. If, as some claim, all 120 (verse 15) received Holy Spirit baptism, then that baptism would qualify them all to be witnesses of Jesus (1:8). If so, why did the group go to all the trouble to name another apostle to serve as witness with the other eleven? Why couldn't Joseph Barsabas and all the other 120 be apostles and witnesses, if they received the Holy Spirit for that purpose?

The scene is now set for one of the greatest events in history. The apostles were where Jesus had told them to be. They were waiting in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit which would guide them to all truth and help them bear their testimony, preach the gospel to the whole world, and open the door to salvation.

Acts 2

The Beginning of the Church – Chapter 2

2:1-13 - The Coming of the Holy Spirit

Jesus had promised that the apostles would receive the Holy Spirit and that they should wait in Jerusalem for this to happen “not many days hence.” He had told them the kingdom would come with power and the power would come when the Holy Spirit came (see notes on 1:3-8). In this chapter we see the fulfillment of these promises.

2:1 – When the Day of Pentecost arrived, they were all assembled together.

Pentecost was a Jewish feast that occurred fifty days after the Passover (or, to be more precise, fifty days after the Sabbath following the Passover). It was also called the “Feast of Weeks” (Exodus 34:22; Numbers 28:26; Deuteronomy 16:10; 2 Chronicles 8:13) and the “The feast of Harvest” (Exodus 23:16).

In this case, Pentecost would have occurred fifty days after Jesus’ death. Because of the way the day was determined, it always fell on a first day of the week – they were to count seven Sabbaths after the Passover, then the next day was this feast – Leviticus 23:15,16. This means that the events of this day, which was one of the most important days in all of New Testament history, occurred on the first day of the week, the same day of the week that Jesus arose from the dead. (Some have disputed that this was a first day of the week, claiming the “Sabbath” referred to was a Sabbath related to the Passover feast. But this cannot be correct, since the counting of “seven Sabbaths” must mean the weekly Sabbath. Then the next day would be the first day of the week.)

Pentecost was one of three annual holy days for which all Jewish males over twenty years of age were required by law to assemble in Jerusalem (see 2:5; Exodus 23:14-17; 2 Chronicles 8:12,13). This is why we will find Jews from all over the world present on this day.

All the apostles were assembled in one place on this day. And this happened in Jerusalem, the very place that Jesus had told them to wait for the Holy Spirit (1:4; 2:5).

“They,” who received the Holy Spirit, refers to the apostles (not the 120 of 1:15).

This is sometimes disputed. Yet the reference must be to the apostles for the following reasons:

(1) The pronoun “they” should refer back to the nearest antecedent, if possible – this would be the twelve apostles, including Matthias (1:26).

(2) The promise had been addressed to the apostles (1:2ff; compare John’s account of Jesus’ promise of the Spirit).

(3) The occasion of chapter 2 is apparently a different occasion from 1:15-26. There is no reason why the same people should be present on both occasions.

(4) The twelve are the ones who spoke by the guidance of the Spirit.

(5) The purpose which Jesus expressly stated as the reason why they would receive the Spirit was to enable them to be witnesses of Jesus (1:8). But it is clear from the choosing of Matthias (1:2off) that the apostles were the ones especially appointed to do this work. Since the power of the Spirit was given to enable them to do this work, and since the others had no responsibility to do this work, there was no need for them to receive the Spirit.

(6) Those whom the Spirit empowered to speak were witnesses of the resurrection – 2:31,32. The discussion of 1:2off shows that this was true of the apostles but not of the other people in general. Peter’s reference to “we all” in verse 32 refers to the same people as “they all” in verse 1.

(7) All who were filled with the Spirit spoke with other tongues (verse 4). But those who did so were all Galileans (verse 7). But not all the 120 were of Galilee. Some were of Judea (especially some of the women). So, those who received the Spirit were the twelve, not the 120, for the twelve were “men of Galilee” – 1:11; 13:31; compare Mark 14:70.

(8) Those who spoke by the guidance of the Spirit were “men and brethren” (2:37). This could not be the 120, since that included women.

(9) The apostles did miracles (verse 43). But this was what the Spirit enabled people to do, so it must be the apostles who received the power.

This conclusion becomes significant, since it shows that Holy Spirit baptism (that occurs in the following verses) was not a general promise to all people.

2:2-4 – The Holy Spirit came upon the apostles enabling them to speak in tongues.

This coming of the Spirit was accompanied by the following characteristics:

(1) A sound from heaven like a great wind filling the place where they were sitting.

(2) Divided (cloven – KJV) tongues like fire sat on each one of them.

(3) They spoke with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. We will see from the context, as we proceed, what the nature of these tongues were. But note that “other” tongues does not mean non-human tongues. We will see that it refers to languages “other” than what the apostles natively spoke.

The “house” where they sat is not clearly identified. However, it is probably not the upper chamber where they had met with the 120. This follows because they had been dwelling in that upper chamber (1:13), but this was a place where other people were able to come and observe the events.

McGarvey suggests that this was likely one of the rooms (sometimes called “houses”) around the temple court. They had been regularly assembling at the temple since Jesus’ ascension (Luke 24:53), and continued regularly to do so after Pentecost (2:46) as a place for teaching the people (compare chapter 3,5). This would easily explain how a great crowd would hear the sound of what happened and soon assemble (2:6).

The event here described must be the promise of the Holy Spirit to which Jesus had referred in Acts 1:3-8.

Peter later explains this as the pouring forth of the Spirit (2:17), the fulfillment of the promise of the Holy Spirit received from the Father (2:33; compare 1:4,5). It gave them the power to bear witness to the people about Jesus, beginning at Jerusalem, just as Jesus had promised, and it came “not many days” after Jesus had promised it (2:14-36; compare 1:3-8). We must conclude that this is the baptism of the Holy Spirit as Jesus had promised.

Interestingly, a similar event occurred when the gospel was first preached by Peter to the Gentiles (Cornelius’ household). Tongue-speaking accompanied both occasions. And when this occurred with Cornelius, Peter said it happened “as on us at the beginning” (10:44-46; 11:15-17). He then quoted the promise regarding Holy Spirit baptism.

Note also that, in both cases, the Spirit came directly from Jesus in heaven without any human agent (compare 2:33 to Matthew 3:11).

The significance of the “tongues dividing as fire” is difficult to determine with certainty.

Some think it refers to something visible that looked like fire divided into flames and sitting on each apostle. Others think it refers to the tongues of verse 4 which came to them and separated so that each one received the power.

Some claim this is the “baptism of fire” referred to in Matthew 3:11. That this cannot be correct is clear for the following reasons:

(1) The context of Matthew 3:11 shows clearly that fire baptism was a form of punishment for sin, probably referring to hell fire.

(2) Nothing in the context of Acts 2 calls this fire baptism. Whereas Acts 1:4,5, with 2:33 and 11:15-17 shows the coming of the Holy Spirit was Holy Spirit baptism.

(3) The tongues of fire “sat upon” each of them. But a baptism would require that they be engulfed in the element. They were, however, completely overwhelmed and engulfed by the Spirit in a symbolic sense (no one can be literally immersed in another person).

(4) When people today claim to receive the baptism in fire and in the Spirit, is there a sound like a rushing mighty wind that fills the whole house? Do tongues of fire appear? Do they speak in languages that people present can recognize (verses 4-11)?

2:5-11 – People from all nations heard the apostles speak, each of them in his own native language.

Since all Jewish males were required to be at Pentecost, there were Jews assembled in Jerusalem at that time from all over the world. Verses 9-11 list 15 different areas. Most of these people would have also been present at the Passover, 50 days earlier, since that was another feast they were required to attend. The people were basically the same ones that had demanded Jesus’ death (2:23,36).

The people congregated to observe what the apostles were doing. They were amazed because, despite the fact they were from many different native lands, they all heard the apostles speak in their own language in which they were born (verses 6,8). Note that Scripture plainly identifies the “tongues” as being **languages** that people spoke and could understand. This is the same sense that we refer to our “native tongue.” Yet the speakers were all Galileans, so they could not have learned all these languages by studying them. Clearly this tongue-speaking was miraculous in that men were immediately able to speak languages they had never learned.

The mechanics of the miracle, however, are not spelled out. Did different apostles speak different languages, and the people separated into different groups in order to hear the apostle who was speaking their language? Did they all address the whole group, but only one language was spoken at a time? Some claim the apostles only spoke one language, but the people heard in various other languages. This does not fit because the passage says they apostles **spoke** the different languages (2:4,6,11); the people did not just **hear** different languages.

Note how appropriate the day was that God chose for this event, since so many Jews would be present to witness it. There are also various typical significances to this day that some have described (compare Coffman).

We are even told something of the content of what the apostles spoke. They spoke the mighty works of God (verse 11). We are not told

exactly what they said, but the general content is described and the people listening could understand the message spoken in each of their own native languages.

Consider the following summary of the characteristics of tongues:

(1) Men spoke in languages which had previously existed and which were even known to some of the people present (verses 6,8,11).

(2) The people present were able, not only to recognize what language was spoken, but to even understand the content of the message (verse 11).

(3) The things spoken consisted of lessons regarding spiritual things which informed and instructed the people who heard, because they were able to understand the message (verse 11).

(4) Yet the miracle, which amazed the people, was that these things were accomplished through men who had never studied nor learned the languages they were speaking (verses 7,8,11,12).

From the above summary, it follows that the tongues accomplished two purposes: (1) The hearers were instructed and informed because they could understand the message in their own language. (2) A miraculous sign confirmed that God was working in these men. The hearers could clearly see that the speakers, who were from only one place, were able to speak all these languages; and they knew the languages were spoken correctly because the hearers themselves knew the languages.

This is the same gift of tongue speaking described in 1 Corinthians 12-14; Acts 10,11, & 19 (the difference in 1 Corinthians is, not that what was spoken was not languages, but that no one in the audience knew the language, so Paul said not to speak it).

Note how this differs from modern so-called tongue speaking.

Men claim today they have received the “Pentecost experience.” They say they have received the same baptism in the Holy Spirit and have the same gifts of the Spirit. But what they do never measures up to what happened here.

What they speak is gibberish that no one present understands, themselves included. There is no evidence they speak any existing language, and studies have shown that they do not speak any known language. Of all the millions who claim to have this gift today, rarely does one find anyone who even claims to speak a human language they have not studied. The reason is obvious: if they made the claim they could be easily tested by calling in someone who knows that language! If people claim they know someone who spoke a known language, it is always someone long ago or far away. It is impossible to get witnesses who can be checked out (John 8:17).

2:12,13 – The audience were amazed by what they heard.

The miracle accomplished its purpose. The people were instructed concerning the mighty works of God, and they were amazed by the sign they were witnessing.

Some however suggested an evil cause: that the men were drunk (compare 2:15). This was nonsense, as we will show under Peter's response, since it could not possibly explain what the account says happened. But it shows the foolish attempts people use to avoid the truth when their hearts are hardened to truth.

This set the stage for Peter's defense and sermon.

2:14-36 - Peter's Sermon

2:14,15 – Peter explained that the apostles were not drunk.

Peter stood up with the eleven and began preaching to the people. His purpose, as an introduction, was to explain to them the cause of the miraculous miracle they were beholding. From this he led them to a conviction of Jesus as Christ and themselves as sinners in need of Christ.

The theme of the sermon was: Jesus is Lord and Christ, and people are sinners in need of forgiveness (verse 36).

At this point it is unclear whether Peter was speaking alone (perhaps in a language such as Greek that all people would understand), the other apostles simply standing up with him, or whether the others were perhaps interpreting Peter's lesson into the various languages earlier spoken. All the apostles had spoken in tongues earlier (verses 4,7,11,13,15), but now it is unclear as to who all is speaking and what language is being spoken.

Peter began his explanation of the events by answering the claim that the men were drunk. He explained that it was only the third hour of the day (about 9:00 AM, since day began an 6:00 AM). In that country, as today, people who would get drunk would do so in the evening, not in the morning. This was especially true at Jewish religious feasts.

The explanation for the tongues, as offered by some people, was obviously inadequate anyway since drunkenness can hardly teach a man a foreign language, but would lead only to incoherent babbling (such as modern-day tongue-speakers do). So Peter did not give a thorough refutation of the charge but simply dismissed it, then went on to show the real source of the events. Besides, by the time he had finished, he had conclusively proved the real source of the power, thereby even more thoroughly refuting the charge.

The sermon which followed was, of course, a masterpiece of evidence showing Jesus to be the Christ. The lines of reasoning that he used to convict these unbelieving Jews are, of course, the same lines of reasoning we should use today to teach anyone who does not believe in Jesus, especially Jews who believe in the Old Testament.

2:16-18 – These events fulfilled a prophecy from Joel.

To explain the events, Peter went to an Old Testament prophecy. Since it was in the Jews' own Scripture, they could only accept it as truth. His quotation is taken from Joel 2:28ff. Note that, from the very beginning of the preaching of the gospel, men appealed to Scripture for evidence. Also the teacher went to common ground – that which was accepted by both the Jews and the Christians to be valid authority.

The prophecy cited was a prediction of gifts coming from the Holy Spirit on all flesh, which empowered people to do the various signs and miracles listed.

The expression “in the last days” refers to the New Testament or gospel age.

See also Hebrews 1:1,2; 9:26; 1 Peter 1:20; 1 John 2:18; Isaiah 2:2,3. Note carefully that Peter here clearly states that Pentecost itself occurred in the last days. The prophecy referred to “the last days,” but was being fulfilled on Pentecost. The “last days” began, apparently, at the death of Jesus and will continue till He comes again. This is in contrast to the Old Testament age which lasted until the death of Jesus. This was also the last days of the Jewish nation, because it was destined to cease when Jerusalem was destroyed in AD. 70.

The prophecy stated that God would pour out of His Spirit on all flesh.

This shows that the sending forth of the Holy Spirit, which Jesus had promised to the apostles (John 14:26; 16:7,13; Acts 1:4-8; 2:4), had also been promised by the Old Testament prophets.

The phrase “upon all flesh” is more limited than it may sound. Surely it does not mean that animal flesh – dogs and cats – would receive these gifts of the Spirit. Nor does it mean people of all ages would receive the blessing, but only people alive at the time the prediction was fulfilled (compare Genesis 6:12,13,17; 7:21). Furthermore, it did not mean that all human beings would receive gifts from the Holy Spirit, nor even that all Christians would. Surely no one who refused to obey the gospel would receive them, and even many Christians in the first century did not (see 1 Corinthians 12; Acts 8:12ff; 19:1ff). No one receives these gifts today (1 Corinthians 13).

The gifts of the Spirit were poured out on “all flesh” in the sense that all types of people received the power (as described in verses 17,18), including both Jews and Gentiles (see also Acts 10 & 11; Luke 3:6 John 17:2; 1 Peter 1:24; compare Romans 3:20; 1 Corinthians 1:29; Galatians 2:16).

The prophecy of Joel began to be fulfilled at Pentecost. Peter is not necessarily saying the whole fulfillment occurred then and only then. But what was happening was one instance that fulfilled the prediction. Some of the things referred to actually continued over some time in fulfillment.

It was especially true, however, that the prophecy's fulfillment involved Pentecost in that the apostles received the power at that time, and others received it through them.

Note that the specific miracles mentioned in verses 17,18 pertain to miraculous revelations – prophecy, dreams, visions, etc. Prophecy is the ability to speak directly for God (compare Matthew 10:19,20). Visions were miraculous revelations by means of something a person saw, though it was not physically occurring before his eyes at the time (compare Acts 10:9-17; 16:9,10). Dreams were also sometimes used by God as a means of revealing His will (compare Joseph's dreams).

Note also that these gifts of miraculous knowledge came on both men and women (compare Acts 21:9). This shows women do have good work to do in teaching (compare Titus 2:4ff; Acts 18:26). But limits have been placed on their teaching when the whole church is assembled (1 Corinthians 14:34f) and in teaching with authority over men (1 Timothy 2:11,12).

Note also that the Holy Spirit gave gifts for the purpose of revealing God's will to man. They were a source of knowledge and information. The purpose was not a moral compulsion that automatically changed people's moral nature so they could not sin, as some claim today. Having received the revelation, the person had to study it to choose for themselves whether or not to obey it, just as the listeners had to do. (See McGarvey.)

Some folks claim that pouring can be used for baptism, because in Acts 2:17 the “pouring” forth of the Spirit is an instance of Holy Spirit baptism.

However:

(1) Both the words “baptism” and “pour” are here used symbolically. One cannot be literally immersed into a person, nor is anything literally poured out from that person. It is not proper to use a symbolic, non-literal instance of a word to try to define that word as used in literal, non-symbolic instances. Naturally the literal meaning will differ from the symbolic meaning.

(2) Holy Spirit baptism is a “baptism” because people were overwhelmed or engulfed in the Spirit. They were so overwhelmed that they were “filled” with the Spirit (2:4), again symbolically. Even if this was the result of the Spirit being “poured” out (which we will see that it is not), it would be “poured” out such that the people were engulfed or overwhelmed.

Holy Spirit baptism caused men's spirits to be overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit just as our bodies are overwhelmed by water in baptism (compare 1:5; see McGarvey's notes). Is this the way denominations pour water in water baptism? Do they pour out so much water that the person becomes “filled” with it? If not, then they cannot use Acts 2:17 to defend their practice.

(3) However, proper understanding will show that ***the passage does not say that the Holy Spirit was poured out***. Note that the prophecy said, “I will pour out ***of*** My Spirit.” In both verse 17 and verse 18 the text contains a word meaning “of” (απο). This word means, in this case, “from” (see NKJV interlinear and Marshall’s Interlinear). Verse 18 should be translated the same as verse 17 (see ASV, KJV, NASB and the NKJV interlinear, which shows that the NKJV is inconsistent here). And neither verse says the Holy Spirit was poured out. It says God poured something out “of” or “from” the Spirit. What was poured out “from” the Spirit was the gifts or miraculous powers described in the prophecy.

So the apostles were baptized in the Holy Spirit (verses 1-4). Peter’s point is that this Holy Spirit baptism began the process of people receiving spiritual gifts. But what was “poured out” here was not the Holy Spirit, but the gifts that people received beginning on this day. This fits the fact that many of the gifts listed were not even received on this day, so far as the record indicates.

Nothing in Acts 2 indicates that daughters or maidservants prophesied here, and no one saw dreams or visions. Nor did the gifts on this day come on “all flesh.” And in fact, when people did receive these gifts, most people did not receive them by Holy Spirit baptism. The apostles received Holy Spirit baptism, but they in turn gave gifts to other people by laying hands on them (see Acts 8:14ff; 19:1-7; etc.). So the apostles received Holy Spirit baptism, then passed on the gifts to others. These gifts began here, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel. ***But the prophecy does not say the Holy Spirit was poured out!*** It says God poured out gifts on people ***from or of*** the Holy Spirit beginning on this day.

2:19,20 – Wonders in heaven and signs on earth

These verses continue the prediction from Joel 2. Also described were wonders and signs in heaven and on earth. The prophecies in New Testament times were often associated with such miraculous signs as gifts of healings, speaking in tongues, raising the dead, etc. It is difficult to determine, however, whether the wonders in heaven mentioned here are literal or figurative. Many Old Testament prophecies of God’s judgments on nations used phrases like these but were symbolic. (See notes on Matthew 24. Compare Isaiah 13:9-11; Ezekiel 32:7,8; 30:3; Obad. 15; Amos 5:18; Zech. 14:1; Joel 2:10. See 1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 1:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10).

The phrase “day of the Lord” is especially a reference to a day in which the Lord does great acts of judgment on evil people. Possible meanings here could be (1) Jesus’ death or resurrection, (2) Pentecost, (3) Destruction of Jerusalem, or (4) Jesus’ second coming.

If that day were Jesus’ resurrection or Pentecost, the signs might refer to those associated with Jesus’ death (see Coffman for this view). But the signs here described were to come ***before*** “the day of the Lord,”

which would not seem to fit Jesus' resurrection or Pentecost. McGarvey applies it to Jesus' second coming, but there will be no signs of that (1 Thessalonians 5:1-10), and the miraculous powers here described ceased long before that. It seems unlikely to me that this would be the meaning, except perhaps as a type, with the primary reference being to some other day. Miller and Stringer suggest that it applies to the destruction of Jerusalem. This harmonizes with Matthew 24, which uses language just like this for the signs preceding the destruction of Jerusalem (verse 29).

2:21 – Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Denominations lift this verse out of context arguing that all the alien sinner must do to accept Jesus is to believe and pray to Him (compare Romans 10:13). However:

(1) If calling on the name of the Lord here refers to prayer, then ***everyone must pray*** for forgiveness as a necessary condition of salvation. But the verse does not say that prayer is the means an alien sinner should use to call on the Lord. On the contrary, the New Testament nowhere teaches that any alien sinner was taught to pray for forgiveness or ever did receive forgiveness by prayer. Instead, the Bible says that God does not hear the prayers of sinners. See James 5:16; 1 John 3:22; Proverbs 28:9; 15:8,29; Psalm 66:18; Isaiah 1:15-17; 59:1,2.

(2) Acts 22:16 shows that an alien sinner calls on the name of the Lord by being baptized. This instance refers to Saul of Tarsus who, when he was told this, had been praying for three days (9:1-18), yet he was still in his sins. Evidently, he was not forgiven by prayer. He had to be baptized to wash away his sins. (See also 1 Peter 3:21).

(3) Matthew 7:21-23 and Luke 6:46 show that it is not enough just to verbally accept Jesus. We must do the will of the Father. Obedience is necessary, not "faith only," let alone a prayer. See also Matthew 22:36-39; John 14:15,21-24; Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:6-10; 6:17,18; Hebrews 5:9; 10:39; 11:8,30; Galatians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9; James 1:21-25; 2:14-26; Luke 6:46; 1 Peter 1:22,23; 1 John 5:3; 2:3-6.

(4) In this very context of Acts 2, when the people asked what to do about their sins, Peter told them to repent and be baptized (verse 38). See notes there regarding the necessity of baptism to forgiveness.

(5) Other passages confirm that what a believing alien sinner needs to do to be forgiven is to be baptized (Mark 16:16; Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:26,27).

It follows that the expression "call on the name of the Lord" refers to the act of appealing to God and His authority to grant to us whatever blessing God has promised (in contrast to appealing to the authority of someone ***else***). That appeal must be made by whatever means God instructs. In some contexts the expression might refer to prayer (as when a Christian prays for forgiveness). But that cannot be the meaning here, as shown above. Instead, one who is not a child of God and who needs forgiveness must call on the Lord for forgiveness by hearing, believing,

repenting, confessing, then being baptized. Confession does require us to state that Jesus is Christ. But this does not refer to prayer, and it will not save us without the other conditions including baptism.

2:22,23 – God testified to Jesus by miracles, but they had crucified Him by the hands of lawless men.

Having explained that the miracle the people had witnessed was caused by the coming of the Holy Spirit, Peter proceeded to discuss the One who had sent the Spirit. He began by telling some basic facts about who Jesus was. This brought Peter to the real subject the people needed to learn about.

Jesus of Nazareth was approved by God, and these very people were aware of it for Jesus had done miracles in their very midst.

These people knew Jesus was a great worker of miracles. Miracles served to confirm that God was really working through the one who had been empowered to do the miracle, and that he was an inspired representative of God as he claimed to be. (See Mark 16:20; John 5:36; 20:30,31; Acts 2:22; 14:3; 2 Corinthians 12:11,12; Hebrews 2:3,4; 1 Kings 18:36-39; Exodus 4:1-9; 7:3-5; 14:30,31.)

In this case, the miracles done by Jesus confirmed His claims. The miracles constitute one of His greatest proofs. Peter uses the three terms that describe New Testament miracles: “miracles, wonders, and signs” (compare Hebrews 2:4). Note, however, that Peter had not yet even made a claim as to who Jesus was. He began by presenting his evidence, then he reached a conclusion.

It is significant that Peter claimed the people to whom he spoke knew about Jesus’ miracles. Had they not known, they would have objected to his statement and would surely never have been converted by his sermon. This claim, coupled with the response of the people, becomes important testimony that Jesus’ miracles really did occur. It also shows that the people were completely without excuse in having rejected and killed Jesus.

The people had killed Jesus according to God’s foreknowledge and plan.

Despite the fact they were familiar with Jesus’ miracles, these very people still crucified the One who did the miracles and was evidently approved by God. They should have known better. They had the evidence, but Jesus did not fit their preconceived idea of the Messiah, so they rejected Him.

Nevertheless, all this happened by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God. It was “in accordance with God’s definite plan and with his previous knowledge (TCNT), “by the deliberate will and plan of God” (NEB). This does not mean that God is responsible for the fact they committed such a crime. He did not make them evil, nor did He compel

them to commit this specific act. God respects the free will and power of all men to choose for themselves to do good or evil, and nothing here or elsewhere teaches otherwise. God did, however, know ahead of time how wicked the people would be, so He used them to accomplish His purpose. The result brought about the means of salvation for all people, including the very ones who had killed Jesus! So, God used evil men to bring about ultimate good for the very people who committed the crime and all other people.

It is simply not true, as premillennialists claim, that God did not know the Jews would reject and kill Jesus. Nor was it an unplanned accident. Nor was Jesus powerless to prevent the act. Peter by inspiration plainly says God foreknew it. It happened according to His counsel or plan. It had been prophesied in the Old Testament, as many New Testament Scriptures confirm (Isaiah 53; Luke 24:25-27,44-46; 1 Peter 1:10,11; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Jesus' sacrifice was necessary for our salvation, so God used men who, by their own choice, were already wicked men.

The reference to "lawless hands" may refer to the guilt of the Jewish audience in calling for Jesus' death before Pilate. They had called for His blood to be on them and on their children – Matthew 27:25. But in a more literal sense, they had killed Jesus by the agency of the Romans. They used the wicked hands of the Roman soldiers. Yet God held these very Jews accountable, because they were the ones who demanded the death, even when Pilate wanted to release Jesus. "**You** have taken ..., crucified, and put to death." His blood was on them, just as they had stated.

Consider the impact of these statements and the great burden of guilt the people must have felt. They had been waiting for generations for the coming of the Messiah. Now He had come and they had killed Him like He was a common criminal. Yet in fact He was now alive again and had sent the great miracle they had just witnessed.

Imagine further the courage Peter possessed to so plainly and publicly accuse them of the crime. They had just killed Jesus. What might they do to Peter when he condemned them for their crime? Yet this one who had, before the crucifixion, denied His Lord three times, now boldly defended Jesus' Lordship and condemned His murderers.

2:24-28 – God raised Jesus from the dead as David prophesied.

Though God had proved that He had sent Jesus, yet the Jews had killed Him. Nevertheless, God then raised Jesus from the dead, because He could not possibly (in God's plan) remain held by death. This is Peter's second great argument to prove that Jesus came from God: the resurrection. In verses 25-28 Peter begins his argument that Jesus had been raised. Proof for such a claim would surely be necessary both because

such an event would be contrary to natural law and because the Jews did not expect their Messiah to die and be resurrected.

Peter offered two proofs for the resurrection: Old Testament prophecies and eyewitness testimony. In the process he introduced his third major argument that Jesus is from God: fulfilled prophecy.

Verses 25-28 quote a prophecy of David (Psalm 16:8-11) that predicted the resurrection of Christ. Verses 25,26,28 describe the joy and confidence possessed by the one referred to (Christ). He had joy and gladness, his flesh rested in hope, and he would know the ways of life because of the presence of God. God is in His presence (before His face) and on His right hand. This could not refer to the fact that Jesus is now on God's right hand (verse 33). Stringer suggests that the one on the right hand is an advocate in a court case – the counsel for the defense. So God stood figuratively at Jesus' right hand even as He was buried, giving confidence that He could rest in hope and would again have joy despite His suffering and death.

But the key verse is verse 27 which shows that God would not leave the soul of His “Holy One” in Hades (Old Testament Sheol) nor would allow Him to see corruption. Hades is the abode of disembodied spirits (Luke 16:19-31). (Remember that Jesus had said He would go to Paradise when He died— Luke 23:43.) At death, the spirit is separated from the body (James 2:26). The point is that at death the soul of the “Holy One” went to Hades and His flesh went back to the ground. But God would not leave the soul in Hades nor the flesh in the earth long enough to decay (compare verse 31). Only a resurrection could satisfy what is predicted here.

“You have made known to me the ways of life” means that, having been dead, the one here described would once again know “the ways of life” – i.e., be made alive again. Indeed, his “flesh shall dwell in hope.” Even in the grave, there was hope for future life.

But who is this “Holy One” here referred to? And how was the prophecy fulfilled? Peter proceeds to explain this in the following verses.

2:29-32 – David's prophecy was fulfilled by Jesus' resurrection.

Peter then gave an inspired interpretation of Psalms 16:8ff, showing that it applies to Jesus, not to David who penned it. Although the reference is partially in the first person (“my soul...”), yet the prediction did not pertain to David Himself; rather, as with many other of David's prophecies, it applied to his seed, the Messiah.

Peter proves this fact by appealing to the general knowledge of the people that David died, was buried, and they even knew where his tomb was. This proves David saw corruption, so the prophecy could not refer to him. Then to whom does it apply?

Verse 30 shows that David was speaking as a prophet concerning his own descendant, the seed of David, the Messiah, whom God had

sworn to raise up to rule on David's throne. Therefore, Psalms 16:8ff is a prediction that the Messiah would arise from the dead – verse 32. Christ went to Hades (Paradise), but He did not stay there. His flesh did not decay because God raised Him up (verse 32). This prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, the very one these Jews had killed.

Further proof of the resurrection is the testimony of the apostles who claimed they were eyewitnesses that Jesus was alive again after His resurrection. Here the apostles, for the first time, bore witness of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit, as Jesus had promised they would do (Acts 1:8). So, we have Old Testament prophecy by a great Jewish patriarch that the Messiah would arise from the dead, and we have adequate testimony from faithful witnesses that He had done as prophesied.

Further, we have a clear statement from an inspired man of God, that Jesus is now sitting on the throne of David and that this began as a result of the resurrection. God had promised David this would happen. As a prophet, he foretold all this, and was speaking of the resurrection when he spoke it. That this conclusion is correct is further confirmed by Peter's later statements.

This of course proves the fulfillment of Jesus' promises regarding the kingdom. Jesus had promised to send the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles and give them power to bear witness for Him. This would happen when the kingdom began. Now we have been told that the Spirit came on Pentecost, gave the apostles power to bear this testimony, and that Jesus was then on David's throne. So, the kingdom had begun.

This destroys the doctrine of the premillennialists who claim that Jesus is not now on David's throne but will be when He returns. It also destroys their view that His rejection by the people was unexpected (v23). They claim His kingdom will begin at Jesus' second coming, but actually it all occurred as a result of His first coming and His resurrection. (2 Samuel 7:12,13; Psalm 89:3,4; 132:11; Luke 1:31-33; 2 Chronicles 6:16,17).

2:33-35 – Jesus has been exalted to God's right hand.

Note the connection of verse 33 to verse 30. In verse 30 we were told that God had sworn that He would raise up a physical descendant of David (fruit of his loins) to rule on David's throne. Verses 31-33 then shows this was fulfilled as a consequence of the resurrection. Foreseeing that God would set the Messiah on David's throne (verse 30), David spoke of the resurrection (verse 31).

Verse 33 then adds that Jesus was exalted to God's right hand where He will rule till all enemies are subjected to Him (verses 34,35). This is a quotation from Psalm 110:1. Peter shows that this prophecy also was not fulfilled in David himself, for he never ascended to heaven. Not only is his flesh still in the grave, but his spirit is still in Hades.

Psalms 110 was also a prophecy of the Christ and shows conclusively that Jesus is reigning now, since that is what He was to do at God's right

hand. He was to rule in the midst of his enemies (Psalm 110:2) and be a priest like Melchizedek – both king and priest at the same time (110:4). Jesus is now at God’s right hand and He is now high priest after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews chapter 6-8). Therefore, He must now be reigning as king.

Further, He must reign till all enemies (in whose midst He reigns) are subjected to Him. This parallels 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 which shows that the last enemy to be defeated will be death, which will be defeated when Jesus returns and raises men from the dead. Then He will return the kingdom to the Father. See also Daniel 2:31-45; Matthew 16:18,19; Mark 1:14,15; 9:1; John 18:36; Acts 1:3-8; 2:1-17,33; Colossians 1:13,14; Hebrews 12:23-29; Revelation 1:9.

Jesus will not receive the kingdom when He returns. He has it now and will reign till He returns. Then He will defeat the last enemy – His enemies will be made his footstool. Until then He is reigning on God’s right hand. (Compare Acts 5:31; Mark 16:19; Luke 22:69; Acts 7:55,56; Romans 8:34; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22; Philippians 2:6-11.)

Further, these verses confirm the conclusion that Jesus sent the Holy Spirit. The coming of the Spirit proved that Jesus was at the right hand of God. This proves the kingdom had begun when the Spirit came, exactly as we have learned (compare John 14:16,17,26; 15:26,27; 16:7-14; Acts 1:3-8; 2:1-4,16-21; See notes on these passages).

For further discussion of the existence of the kingdom in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

2:36 – Therefore, Jesus is both Lord and Christ.

Peter then stated the conclusion to which his whole sermon had been directed. Despite the fact that the Jews had killed Jesus, God had made Him Lord and Christ. He was their God-ordained ruler (Lord) and the Anointed One (Christ, Messiah), whom they had for years been seeking and expecting. Note that this confirms that Jesus is now reigning. The very expression “Christ” proves this to be the case.

Concerning the fact the Jews were responsible for Jesus’ death, see verse 23 and notes there. The Jews had for generations waited for their Messiah. They hoped for Him, spoke of Him, prepared for Him, and waited for Him. Finally He came, and they killed Him!

What a powerful conclusion to Peter’s sermon! What an amazing impact it must have had on any honest Jew who listened! It is a masterpiece of Biblical preaching. Note how Peter built his case, then saved the conclusion for the end. He let the people reason on the evidence before he gave the “bottom line.” This is an excellent example of effective teaching.

And note also that Peter's point had been conclusively proved. The people could know it "assuredly" to be true. There is no reason for honest people to remain uncertain. The proof is convincing. It is based on miracles, fulfilled prophecy, and Jesus' resurrection. This is the same approach we should use when teaching people who question or doubt who Jesus is. The evidence is just as convincing today as it was then. We should not expect people to accept the gospel claims on any human authority, as by taking the word of their parents, preachers, or church authorities, etc. We should use the evidence God has provided in His word.

2:37-47 - Conversion of 3000 Jews

2:37 – The audience, cut to the heart, asked what to do.

The effect of Peter's plain, straight-forward sermon was that the people were pricked to the heart. They asked what to do about their sin. Note that it was obvious, both from Peter's sermon which condemned the people for having killed Jesus, and from the people's response, that they were sinners in need of forgiveness. This response would make no sense if they were forgiven people asking what to do to show they had been forgiven. It is the response of guilty people asking what to do to receive forgiveness. This is important in understanding Peter's response and the efforts of some people to change the significance of it.

Note that the audience realized there was something they must do. God did not unconditionally save them with no action required on their part. They were not totally depraved, unable to believe or seek to please God. They understood their condition and understood their need to act.

They had reached this response because of the preaching of the gospel message: "when they **heard** this." This shows the power of gospel preaching on honest hearts. The people neither needed nor received a direct operation of the Holy Spirit on their hearts apart from the word. The spoken message, including the evidence that demonstrated it to be true, was sufficient to change the hearts of men. See Romans 1:16; 10:17; 1 Corinthians 1:18-24; etc.

Specifically, they realized their guilt because the preaching told them they were wrong and proved that they had violated God's will. People today may complain about preaching that condemns sin as "negative preaching." They may want a more positive message that eases people into a "conversion" without burdening them with a sense of guilt. Neither Jesus nor any apostle nor any inspired gospel preacher ever used such a soft-soap approach.

We should not be harsh, cruel, or unloving. But people will not realize their need for salvation till they realize they are in sin. They will not seek to be saved till they know they are lost. They will not seek to repent (change their mind) till they realize they are going the wrong direction. Gospel preaching must necessarily tell sinners when they are wrong. This is truly speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

Note also that the response necessarily implies that the people believed the message. Peter had told them to know assuredly that Jesus is Lord and Christ. No verse in this account specifically mentions faith, but it is necessarily implied from their response. Also implied is godly sorrow. They realized they had done wrong, were cut to the heart by that realization, and sought to relieve the problem.

Peter had already told them that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (verse 21). Their response shows that they did not understand this to be a full explanation of what they needed to do. Specifically, they did not believe they had been told to pray for forgiveness and that was all that would be needed, if they truly believed – as many denominational preachers teach. They realized they had not yet been told specifically what to do to call on the Lord for salvation. Nor did Peter respond by saying he had already told them what to do or that they should pray for forgiveness. He gave an entirely different answer.

This was the first time in the gospel age that this question had been asked or answered. Surely the answer given here is of great significance. Peter would not have given an inaccurate or irrelevant answer. Whatever he told them to do is exactly what all people in the history of the gospel must do to be forgiven by the blood of Jesus, when they have first come to believe in Him.

Finally, note that the audience surely addressed their question to the same people who had spoken the message to them. They describe the speakers as “men and brethren.” This is because it was the apostles who had spoken (verse 14). This confirms that the ones who had received Holy Spirit baptism were the apostles, not the 120 of 1:12-15. The 120 included women, but those who spoke were only men and brethren (2:37). The purpose of Holy Spirit baptism had been to enable men to speak their testimony of Jesus (1:8). The only ones who so spoke were the apostles, so the apostles were the only ones who received Holy Spirit baptism on this occasion.

2:38 – Peter’s response told them to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins.

Note the significance of the phrases of verse 38:

“Repent”

This means to change one’s mind. Specifically, it shows that these people, like all other people, were guilty of sin and needed to make up their minds to turn away from sin and turn to God in submissive obedience. Many other passages also show that repentance is essential to salvation: Luke 13:3,5; 24:47; Acts 17:30; Matthew 21:28-32; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 20:21; 2 Peter 3:9; 2 Corinthians 7:10.

Note that repentance is not just sorrow for sin. These people were already sorry (cut to the heart), but Peter still told them to repent. Godly sorrow leads to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10). Repentance is the

change of mind in which one decides to live for God instead of sin. Many people are sorry for their sin, but not sorry enough to change.

Repentance is essential to conversion, both because God commands it and because without it no one would follow through with the other essential steps to forgiveness. Repentance is that point in a person's life in which he realizes he has been guilty of sin, and he determines, decides, or makes the commitment to change his life and live in service to God. Such a decision is absolutely essential to a further life of faithful service to God, so without it He will not forgive us.

Note further that Peter did not respond to the hearers' question by saying there was nothing to do. That is the answer that many Protestants believe to be true. They say, "There is nothing man can do to be saved. Jesus has already done it all." Then they proceed to contradict themselves by telling people they must believe in Jesus (which is doing something) and "pray the sinner's prayer," which is not only doing something, but is doing something never told to any unbaptized alien sinner. But what these people are really doing is denying that baptism is necessary to salvation. But Peter did not agree. Instead of saying there was nothing to do, he proceeded to tell them what they must do, and he included baptism in his response.

"Be baptized"

Baptism here is not Holy Spirit baptism as promised to the apostles in Acts 1. As discussed in chapter 1, that baptism was a promise, not a command. It was limited to just a few individuals. It gave miraculous powers that were needed only in the age when the New Testament had not been completed. As such, it occurred only on two recorded occasions: in Acts 2 when the first Jews were converted, and again in Acts 10 when the first Gentiles were converted. In both cases apostles were directly and personally involved. As such, it cannot occur today, since we have no one today qualified to serve as apostles (see on 1:21,22). Holy Spirit baptism has served its purpose and ceased (compare 1 Corinthians 13).

Today there is only one baptism (Ephesians 4:4-6), and that is the baptism here referred to that all men need to receive to be saved. It is the baptism of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16). It is an immersion in water (Acts 8:36-39; 10:47,48; Hebrews 10:23; Romans 6:3,4; Colossians 2:12). Many Scriptures show that it is essential in order for one to receive forgiveness of sins: Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21.

"Every one of you"

These acts of repentance and baptism were commanded and required of all people present. Verse 39 shows that, since God is no respecter of persons, the same acts are required of all people in order to

receive the blessing of remission. They are universal conditions of salvation.

“In the name of Jesus Christ”

That is, by His authority, will, and commandment (compare notes on 4:7,9,10). He had given commandment or authority regarding this in Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16. To teach and baptize people as He commanded is to do so by His authority or in His name. Those who do so are acting as agents on His behalf, just as an ambassador acts on behalf of a nation. See also Acts 8:12,16; 10:47,48; 19:5. See Matthew 28:19 to compare to the expression baptizing “in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

“For the remission of sins”

Remission means forgiveness or pardon. This passage states the purpose or reason why all accountable people need baptism. Jesus shed His blood to save us from our sins, but His blood was shed to offer salvation to all (1 Timothy 2:3-6). In order for any particular individual to receive that forgiveness for his own life, he must meet the conditions that God’s word describes. Even if, as a result of repentance, a person were to live his life in faithful service to God, that would not eliminate his guilt for past sins. This can come only by remission or forgiveness of those sins.

Many people seek to deny that baptism is essential in order to receive forgiveness of sins, yet this verse is one of many that clearly teach it is essential. Remission of sins is here clearly stated as following from baptism. There is no passage in the gospel that describes salvation as coming before or without water baptism. There are verses that mention salvation but do not mention baptism, just like there are verses that mention salvation but do not mention faith, do not mention repentance, or do not mention confession. But when salvation and baptism are both mentioned, salvation is never before baptism but follows from it. Likewise, there is no passage anywhere that teaches an unsaved person to pray for forgiveness of sins. Rather, they are told to believe, repent, confess, and be baptized.

Baptism is necessary so our sins can be washed away (Acts 22:16), so we can come into Christ (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27), so we can come into contact with Jesus’ saving death and resurrection (Romans 6:3,4; Colossians 2:12), so we can have remission of sins (Acts 2:38), so we can be saved (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21), and so we can enter the church, which is the body of all people who have been saved or cleansed by Jesus’ blood (1 Corinthians 12:13; Acts 2:47; 20:28; Ephesians 5:23,25). To claim that baptism is not essential to forgiveness of sins is to deny multitudes of Scriptures.

Yet some defy the evidence and say this verse means we should be baptized “for” remission in the sense of “because of” remission, rather

than “in order to receive” remission. They claim that people are saved by faith and repentance before baptism, but they are baptized “because they have” remission. It is like a man who receives a ticket “for speeding,” or is given a pay check “for his work,” etc. “For” in English can be used to mean because a thing has already happened, rather than in order that it may happen.

However, such an argument cannot possibly fit this passage for the following reasons:

(1) We have already shown many other passages confirming that baptism is essential in order to receive forgiveness.

(2) Though “for” in English may mean “because of,” the Greek word used here (εἰς) never means because of. Its fundamental meaning here as elsewhere always looks to the future, never to the past.

(3) Compare this passage to Matthew 26:28, where Jesus said He would shed His blood “for remission of sins.” Did He shed it because people already had remission or in order that they might receive it? To use “for” in Matthew 26:28 as people do in Acts 2:38 would blaspheme the very purpose and necessity of Jesus’ death! See also Luke 24:47.

(4) Consider the context of Acts 2:38. If Peter is telling people to be baptized because they already have remission, then of course he must be addressing people who had already been saved. Is that the case, or is he addressing people who were yet in sin and needed to be saved? To ask the question is to answer it, if one understands what has happened. Peter had condemned the people of being guilty of having killed Jesus, and they asked what they should do about it because the message pricked them to the heart. Obviously these were sinners in need of forgiveness, not saved people being told how to express the fact they were already saved.

(5) The crowning proof that the people being addressed were sinners seeking forgiveness, not people already forgiven, is the fact Peter first told them to “**repent**.” Why tell them to repent if they have just been forgiven? Do people just forgiven need to repent? Does repentance come after forgiveness like it is claimed baptism does? If not, then the people here addressed are not saved people being told what to do to because they have forgiveness. Rather, they are sinners being told what to do to receive forgiveness.

All these evidences prove “for remission of sins” means people must be baptized in order to receive the remission of sins. Note that this proves what the **purpose** of baptism is. And like other of God’s commands, when He gives the purpose with which we must do a thing, if we do it for a different purpose, we have changed His plan and displease Him. Many Scriptures show that we must act by God’s authority, not changing what He has commanded. To do differently from what He commanded is to disobey and displease Him: Matthew 15:9,13; Galatians

1:8,9; 2 John 9- 11; Colossians 3:17; Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; 3:5,6; Revelation 22:18,19.

Compare this to the Lord's Supper. God assigned an act with a meaning. To do that act, but not do it for the right purpose, brings condemnation rather than pleasing God (1 Corinthians 11:23-29).

Likewise, if the proper purpose of baptism is that we might receive remission of sins, if we fail to do it for that purpose, then we bring God's anger, not His blessing, on ourselves. Specifically, the purpose of baptism is that we might receive remission. If people have never been baptized for that reason, then they have never received that blessing: they have never received remission, so they remain in their sins. Such people are still lost and need to be Scripturally baptized so they can obey God and be saved. Even if they were immersed in baptism, if it was for the wrong reason, then it still must be done correctly as with the men in Acts 19:1-6. Otherwise, the sinner is still in his sins.

For further discussion of baptism, see our articles on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site. Included are articles that discuss the purpose of baptism and its necessity to salvation, the action of baptism (sprinkling, pouring, or immersion), and infant baptism. Also included are articles about salvation by "faith alone," and articles showing that Holy Spirit baptism is not the baptism described here, but has ceased. Please visit our site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

"Ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

What gift is this? It is something Peter here promises that "every one" will definitely receive if they repent and are baptized (compare Acts 5:32). It is a promise, not just for the people on Pentecost, but for their children (future generations), and all whom the Lord calls by the gospel (v39).

Whatever this gift may be, it cannot be Holy Spirit baptism nor any form of miraculous spiritual gift for the following reasons:

(1) If it were Holy Spirit baptism, that would make two baptisms for all people, whereas there is today only one (Ephesians 4:4-6).

(2) Holy Spirit baptism and spiritual gifts, as we have already studied, were temporary, have fulfilled their purpose, and have ceased (1 Corinthians 13).

(3) They were only received with involvement of apostles, but there are no apostles today.

(4) Spiritual gifts were never promised to all people, not even in the first century when they existed. Even then there were many Christians who had repented and been baptized, but they never received these gifts (compare Acts 1:4-8; 8:6-12; 19:1-7; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11,29,30).

(5) Though the people here in Acts 2 were directly promised "the gift of the Holy Spirit," and 3000 obeyed, yet only the apostles were said to do miracles (compare verses 41,43).

(6) In Acts 10, other people received Holy Spirit baptism, and it is even called a “gift,” but it came before water baptism, not afterward as a fulfillment of a promise that followed baptism.

(7) Men were to “wait” for Holy Spirit baptism (Acts 1:4ff), but the gift here came as a direct result of baptism for remission of sins, which men were commanded to obey without waiting (Acts 22:16).

(8) The “gift” automatically came to all who were saved, therefore any who do not have it are not saved. Is it true that all are lost if they do not have miraculous gifts or Holy Spirit baptism?

It must follow that the gift promised in this verse is some non-miraculous gift of the Spirit. The Spirit has given various different gifts. The question is what gift is here referred to? Since it is something that all necessarily receive as a result of baptism, I conclude that it must be the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit dwells in all saved people, just as Peter promises here.

1 Corinthians 3:16 – We are a temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in us.

1 Corinthians 6:19 – Our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in us because we were bought with a price. All people, who have been purchased (redeemed) by the blood of Christ, have the Spirit of God dwelling in them. (Note the parallel in 1 Corinthians 3:16.)

Romans 8:9 – If the Spirit of God (Christ) does not dwell in us, we do not belong to God.

These verses necessarily teach that the Spirit does dwell in people today. They also show that the Spirit dwells in **all** people who become true children of God, and the Spirit begins to dwell in us at the time we become God’s children (not at some later point). All this agrees with Peter’s promise in Acts 2:38. [See also Acts 2:38; 5:32; James 4:5; Romans 5:5; Ephesians 5:18.]

What is this indwelling of the Spirit? Whatever explanation we give, we must remember that: (1) The indwelling will be for all Christians from the moment of conversion on. (2) It must explain how the Father and Son also dwell in us, since the Bible also says they dwell in us (see verses below). (3) It must be something distinct from Holy Spirit baptism, miracles, etc.

The human spirit dwells directly and personally in the human body as in a temple or tabernacle. This is how our spirits inhabit our bodies, and this is how Jesus’ spirit inhabited His body. (Note 2 Corinthians 4:16; 5:1,4; John 2:21; James 2:26; Hebrews 10:5; 2 Peter 1:13f; Luke 23:46.) Is this how the Holy Spirit dwells in us? If so, then in the same way, the Father and Son also dwell in us, we dwell in them, and Christians dwell in one another, etc. Do our spirits inhabit God’s body, etc.? Do all these spirits inhabit our bodies? The nature of the language does not necessitate such a direct, personal indwelling and we will see that the Bible gives a different explanation of it.

What work does the Spirit do that would require a direct, personal indwelling? It does not do miracles in us today, as we have seen. What does it do that would require a personal indwelling? There is no Bible evidence that the Spirit directly, personally indwells us.

Rather, the indwelling involves **fellowship** with the Spirit based on the influence of God's Word and resulting in the fruits of the Spirit. Specifically, the indwelling involves fellowship or a close relationship with the Spirit, including all the blessings that are associated with such a relationship.

John 17:20-23 – For the disciples to be “in” the Father and Son and they “in” us and they “in” one another means to be “one.” This is a close spiritual relationship of harmony, unity, and fellowship.

John 15:1-6 – We “abide in” Jesus as a branch abides in the vine: close contact. It is the opposite of being cut off or separated from Him (verses 2,5,6).

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 – The context discusses fellowship, communion, agreement, etc., as opposed to separation. God dwells in us as His temple if we are His people, sons and daughters. We must fellowship God or sin – one or the other. If we separate from sin, God will fellowship us – He will dwell in us as His sons and daughters.

1 John 1:3,6,7; 2:3-6 – This passages discusses how to fellowship Father and Son, and how to know we are right with them. The fellowship (1:3,6) is called “knowing” God or “abiding in” God (2:3-6).

So, when the Bible says the Father and Son “dwell in” us and in one another, etc., it means that the individuals have a close relationship of unity and fellowship. Why assume it means something different when used for the Spirit dwelling in us? Many other Scriptures talk about having fellowship with the Spirit. Note 2 Corinthians 13:14 and Philippians 2:1 (Hebrews 6:4).

I conclude that Peter is here promising that all who repent and are baptized for remission of sins will receiving the indwelling – i.e., the fellowship – of the Holy Spirit, accompanied by all the blessings that this involves. Some would say that the gift of the Holy Spirit is salvation. In practical terms, that is not significantly different from the view I have expressed. Those who are saved have the fellowship with the Holy Spirit. The two go hand-in-hand. If the gift is salvation, then other verses show that those who receive it have the indwelling of the Spirit. If the gift is the indwelling of the Spirit, then people must be saved to receive it.

2:39,40 – The promise is for all who are called by the gospel.

Having told the people to repent and be baptized, Peter then says this promise (of remission of sins accompanied by the gift of the Spirit) was offered, not just for the people present that day, but for their children (future generations), to those who are afar off (including Gentiles and people of other nations), even as many as God calls to Him. This is exactly the commission Jesus gave the apostles to preach. They were to

teach the gospel to all men, thereby calling them to salvation (Mark 16:15,16; Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:47; 2 Thessalonians 2:13,14). These instructions are not for just a few, nor just for one nation, such as the Jews. They are for all men everywhere (Acts 17:30; 2:21; Ephesians 2:11-21). Even Peter and the other apostles, as they preached this, did not understand that this meant Gentiles could be saved by the gospel. This was revealed further later.

Note that “children” here does not mean that little babies are included in the command to be baptized. Peter had just said to “repent” and be baptized. Can little babies do that? “Children” are simply offspring or descendants. The word of itself tells nothing about how old they are. My “children” are still my “children,” though all are grown adults. The context and numerous other passages show that the command to be baptized applies to our “children” or future generations only when they are old enough to understand, believe, repent, and obey the gospel message which “calls” them. (See Mark 16:15,16; John 6:44,45; Acts 2:36,41; Galatians 3:26,27; Acts 8:12; Romans 10:9,10; Acts 8:35-39.) Babies need not be baptized because they are not guilty of sins to be forgiven (Ezekiel 18:20; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Psalm 106:37,38; Matthew 19:14; 18:3).

Peter had told them who Jesus is and what to do to receive His forgiveness. But He also taught them “many other words.” This was not the end of Peter’s message. It is not all recorded. In particular he said they should “save themselves” from that crooked generation. Man cannot save himself in the sense of earning salvation or meriting it by his own good life. But he can and must choose for himself to meet the conditions of forgiveness. When he does, then Jesus’ blood applies to him and he is saved. But the choice depended on him. Man saves himself in that he must choose to act according to God’s will (Philippians 2:12; 1 Timothy 4:16).

2:41 – Three thousand gladly obeyed the message.

The result of this first gospel sermon was that 3000 souls received the word and, in obedience to the Divine command, were baptized (compare verse 38), and were added together (compare verse 47).

Note that these were baptized “that day.” When they received the word and repented, their baptism was not postponed until even the next day. This is typical of conversions in Acts. But it is not typical of denominational practice regarding baptism. Most Protestant denominations will schedule a baptismal service sometime in the future, weeks or even months after a person has requested baptism. Or at least they feel no sense of urgency about it.

Why does denominational practice differ from that of the Bible? Because the denominations do not understand the urgency of baptism. If, as denominations teach, a person is saved regardless of whether or not he has been baptized, then why not postpone baptism? There would be

no urgency; so their practice conforms with their doctrine that people are already saved without baptism. But if a person is still in sin until he has been baptized, then there is good reason not to postpone baptism! One should obey as soon as possible in order to avoid the danger of dying in sin. This is exactly how baptism was practiced in the gospel, and this again confirms our conclusion about the purpose of baptism.

Some have argued that it would be impossible to baptize 3000 people by immersion on the same day (either there was not time or there would not be enough water), so baptism here was not immersion. However, this is an argument from human reasoning, not from Scripture. Scripture shows that baptism is an immersion (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12; Hebrews 10:22; Acts 8:38,39; etc.). People who argue that such would not be possible here in Acts 2 cannot prove their assertion. How do they know there was not enough water or not enough time, etc.?

Any large city needs a water supply, either by a river, lakes, or reservoirs. Jerusalem had no river, but did have many large pools, some of which remain to this day, large enough to baptize dozens of people at the same time (such as the pools of Bethesda, Gihon, Hezekiah, and Siloam). McGarvey shows, by simple calculation that any school child can do, that the apostles themselves could have baptized 3000 people in a little over four hours (one baptism per apostle per minute would make 720 per hour, and so 3000 in a little over four hours). However, I would point out that there is no reason the apostles should do all the baptizing. There were other disciples among the original group, and there is no reason why any man who had been baptized could not then begin baptizing others.

But to what group were these people added when they were “added to them”? The exact meaning is not explained, so we may not know for sure. Perhaps the idea is that the group began with the apostles; so other people, as they were baptized, were added to the apostles. But in fact the words “to them” are not in the original, as shown by the translations that italicize words added by the translators. So the original says the 3000 were added. This could mean simply that they were added together, so they became the group to whom others were added as they were saved (verse 47).

2:42 – The converts continued in the apostles’ doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer.

These new converts immediately became busied about the work of Christians. Repentance requires a change of life. These first converts demonstrated that change of life. They became steadfast in various acts that constitute worship or praise to God. These were especially emphasized in worship meetings or assemblies, though some should also be done privately.

The apostles' teaching

The apostles had, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, taught the people the basics of faith in Christ and how to be forgiven of sin; but there was much more to learn. As Jesus had commanded, they needed to be taught all His will (Matthew 28:18-20). This teaching the apostles continued to do. We likewise need to be sure that people are taught the full knowledge of God's will.

Note that the apostles were the ones through whom this inspired doctrine came. They had received the guidance of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13; Acts 1:8). Later they passed this miraculous knowledge on to others by laying hands on them (8:14-18; 19:6); but still it came, at least indirectly, through the apostles. There simply could be no revelation from God without the involvement of apostles. Today we have the message they revealed in the written word, so we no longer need living apostles (2 Timothy 3:16,17; Ephesians 3:3-5; 1 Corinthians 14:37). Since there could be no direct revelation without living apostles, and since there are no apostles living today, then there can be no direct guidance of the Spirit today. We have all truth in the Scriptures.

Fellowship

Fellowship basically means sharing. Here, of course, it is sharing in God's work. It may include the sharing of financial means as described in verses 44,45. However, the sharing of Christians in the local church is clearly defined elsewhere, and much more is involved than just the collection. The emphasis in New Testament fellowship is always on that which is spiritual. Local churches had fellowship in spreading the gospel, in worshiping God, and in helping needy Christians. They are also warned not to have fellowship in sin (Philippians 4:15ff; Acts 2:44; 4:35; 1 John 1:3-7; Titus 1:4; Jude 3; Revelation 1:9; 1 Corinthians 10:16-21; Ephesians 5:11; 2 John 9-11; etc.).

People today grossly misuse this gospel word by applying it to recreation, entertainment, social gatherings, and common meals (coffee & donuts). They lump all this under the term "fellowship," and conclude it is all authorized church work because the early church participated in "fellowship." But calling a thing by a certain name does not make it fit the Bible usage of the term. God has, by inspired usage, shown what He means by terms such as baptism, church, elder, disciple, etc. Men may think they have justified their practice by using these words in ways that do not fit the meaning and practice God associates with them. But if they are not using the words to refer to what God meant by them, their practice remains unauthorized in God's eyes and they are only fooling themselves. The same applies to the modern misuse of the word "fellowship."

Breaking of bread

This is a common expression for a meal. Like many other Bible words, whether it refers to a typical "common meal" (as in v46) or to

some special meal, would depend on the context. The expression is used elsewhere for the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23ff; Matthew 26:26ff). This was the special meal that Jesus had told the disciples, before He died, that He wanted them to partake of in His kingdom. (See notes on verse 46).

So what meal is here referred to? If it was just a common meal, what would be the point of Luke telling us that the disciples continued steadfastly in common meals? Everyone does that. The reference here must be to the Lord's Supper, since verse 42 is describing various acts done in worship and praise to God. The verse describes spiritual activities these people emphasized because they were converted. Why mention common meals specifically following from their conversion, since even unbelievers do that? Why would common meals be placed alongside prayer and studying God's word as the example of early Christians? Are we to consider them of equal requirement in our service to God? Surely not, but if this is the Lord's Supper, then this fits the context and shows us the importance of being involved regularly in this memorial to Jesus' death, a highly spiritual activity.

Further, it is implied they were doing these things together, and the implication is clearly that this was assembled worship (or at least included assembled worship). The Lord's Supper is done in assembled worship, but common meals are forbidden in that context – 1 Corinthians 11:17ff.

This passage does not tell us when or how often the disciples participated in any of these things, only that they continued in them steadfastly. This would imply regular, diligent participation. Acts 20:7 tells us specifically when they had the Lord's Supper.

Prayer

Prayer is man talking to God (compare Acts 4:23ff; Philippians 4:6,7; 1 Peter 5:7). In the gospel we can approach God through Jesus as mediator (1 Timothy 2:5). We must pray in His name. These new converts had their communication lines with God open. He spoke to them through the inspired teaching of His word, and they spoke to Him in prayer. We today need to do the same.

Note that, in the early church, converts were "steadfast" in these activities right from the start. These were not things to be neglected. Yet today, too many members do neglect these areas, and sure enough they soon fall away completely. These steps are necessary to growth and faithfulness.

2:43 – The apostles did many wonders and signs.

The apostles continued to have the ability to do miraculous signs. These signs continued throughout the time of the apostles, and we will see they could lay hands on other people and give them the power. But if all 120 disciples of Acts 1 received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as

some claim, why are we told throughout the chapter that it is the apostles doing the miraculous things? Why did not all the disciples do them if they all received the same power?

The purpose of miracles was to confirm that God was directly involved in events. This proved God's existence, but when God worked miracles through a man who claimed to be a spokesman for God, the miracles confirmed the teacher's claims. See notes on verse 22 above. Just as Jesus' miracles confirmed that He had been sent from God to speak and teach God's word, so the miracles done through the apostles demonstrated that they were from God. This confirmed their teaching to be inspired truth, which resulted in fear (awe and respect) for God and His message in the hearts of people. They realized they were hearing the message of God that convinced them of their sins and their need to believe in Jesus and serve Him (compare verses 36,37).

2:44,45 – The brethren shared with the needy members of the number.

This does not refer, as some claim, to communal living. Members were not all required to give up all personal possessions, so that all property would then be owned by the church. Compare Acts 4:32-5:11.

People "had all things in common" in the sense described in the context: they did not consider what they had to belong to themselves alone but shared willingly with others (4:32). But the amount each person gave was a matter of voluntary choice (5:4). Further, the funds were then distributed to cases of need (2:45; 4:35), not to balance out possessions so all would have equal wealth. Verse 46 indicates that most still had houses, and those who later sold houses did so only because there was an emergency need. Others still had houses later (chapter 12; 21:8; etc.).

So, while this example does not require communal church life, it does demonstrate great generosity and sharing, which we today should be willing to imitate in times of similar necessity.

Note that this need was met for those "among them." Christians, as individuals, were generous to all people, including unbelievers. But that was done as individuals and is not what is here described. This context discusses how the group cared for one another's needs. We will see, as we proceed, that a pattern exists in this regard. As a group (church) the disciples cared for other Christians, never for outsiders. It was as individuals that they cared for their own family members as well as those who were not Christians.

Note: We have seen this was not communal church living. Even less was it "Communism" as advocated by many today. This giving was voluntary, motivated by love for spiritual reasons. It was not a law demanded and enforced by the government, taken by force even against the will of the owners! It was an act of service to God, whereas Communism denies the very existence of God! The people here did not give

up businesses and jobs, but continued to own them. And this was done among believers only, whereas Communism is forced on all.

2:46 – The disciples met in the temple and ate in their homes.

Besides caring for their needy members, this early church met day by day steadfastly in the temple. This was apparently their place of meeting at first (probably a court or porch of the temple – compare 3:1; 5:12,20; etc.). Christians were not required to worship in the temple, of course, since the Old Testament was removed when Jesus died, but it was available to them, free, and large enough to meet their needs. Plus it had the great advantage of being where unconverted Jews would come, observe, and learn the truth.

Note that the early church did not meet just on the first day of the week.

Other times of meeting are authorized. On the other hand, this verse does not require meetings every day of the week today (compare “daily” in verse 47). The church met regularly and often enough to meet the needs of the people for teaching. Later examples do not indicate this same frequency. This church had more need of assembling than later cases, since they were all new converts in need of further instruction and they had no written word to study on their own. It is also likely that, since they had come from afar for the feast, many stayed to be taught so they could return home grounded in the truth. This added urgency to their need to meet together to study.

In contrast to these public meetings, the people also ate common meals at home, appreciating what they received from the Lord. This verse is a summary overview of the lives of the members, both spiritual worship and daily routine. There is a clear distinction between spiritual worship, done in a joint capacity, and common meals eaten as individual activity, just as in 1 Corinthians 11:17ff.

Does “breaking bread” here refer to a common meal, or could it be the Lord’s Supper?

Words often have different meanings in different contexts. In particular, many phrases in the New Testament are common, everyday words often used in Greek to refer to common things, yet God sometimes used these words with special meanings that are unique to the gospel. Examples are: lord, god, church, kingdom, baptism, elder, deacon, fellowship, brother, father, repent, etc., etc. As we examine any particular verse where such words are used, we must determine whether the meaning is the common meaning or the special gospel meaning on the basis of **context**, with help from **other passages**.

The expression “break bread” or “break the loaf” often refers to simply a common, ordinary meal. The same expression, however, is often used in the New Testament to refer to the Lord’s Supper (see verse

42 above). Context shows us that “break bread” refers to the Lord’s Supper in the following instances: Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:23,24. On the other hand, context shows us that “break bread” refers to a common meal in the following instances: Jeremiah 16:7; Lamentations 4:4; Matthew 14:19; 15:36; Mark 6:41; 8:6,19; Luke 9:16; 24:30,35; Acts 20:11; 27:34,35,36.

Note that, in several of the references to common meals, ***other expressions*** are used in context that confirm that a common meal is meant. Note especially the parallel between Acts 2:46 and 27:34-36. We are told both that bread was broken and that people ate food (or took food). Both expressions refer to the same meal. The second expression explains the first and assures us that it does in fact refer to a common meal.

Finally, if “break bread” in Acts 2:46 did mean the Lord’s Supper and “ate food” there refers to a common meal, then we would have Christians having the Lord’s Supper at home in conjunction with a common meal. But this would clearly violate what Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. He instructed us there to eat the Lord’s Supper when we come together in the church (verses 18,20,33), but to eat regular meals at home (i.e., elsewhere than in the worship assemblies of the church – verses 22,34).

I conclude that “break bread” in Acts 2:46 cannot be referring to the Lord’s Supper, but refers to the eating of common meals “at home,” just like Paul taught. This passage confirms that the church did not eat common meals together as a church function, but ate them as individual activity apart from church functions. They met for worship in the temple but ate common meals at home.

For what it’s worth, various commentators who say Acts 2:46 refers to a common meal are: McGarvey, Vine, Zerr, Clarke, Lenski, Coffman, Robertson, Sommer, Barnes, Stringer (and, of course, no doubt others whom I have not consulted).

2:47 – The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

At first the church was looked upon favorably by people in general. We will soon see, as the story progresses, however, that this changed as fickle men rejected the truth and began to persecute Christians.

As people obeyed and received forgiveness of their sins, the Lord added them to the church. When people meet the conditions of forgiveness (verses 38-41), they are immediately and automatically put into the church by the Lord. They are not voted in, do not purchase membership, etc. Nor is a person saved first and then afterward they do something different to enter the church. Being saved occurs simultaneously with becoming part of the church, because the church is the saved (Ephesians 5:23-25; Acts 20:28). [Note that some translations do not include

the word for “church,” yet the saved were surely added to some group, and the context clearly confirms that the church was that group.]

So, at the point of baptism a person’s sins are forgiven (see notes on Acts 2:38), but by the same act one enters the church (1 Corinthians 12:13). Note that it is thereby impossible to be saved outside the church under the gospel. The church is essential to salvation, not because the church saves, but because all the saved are in the church by the Lord’s ordination.

The chapter concludes with the church in existence and all saved people in the church. Clearly the church began on Pentecost in the sense that people were first added to it on that day and from that day forward it was open for people to enter. Prior to that time, the church was something coming in the future (Matthew 16:18). After that it was in existence. This is also the beginning of the kingdom, for the kingdom is just a different term emphasizing a different aspect of the same thing. The Spirit came, the kingdom was declared, and people were first allowed to identify with it and receive its blessings beginning in this chapter.

Acts 3

The Healing of the Lame Man and Its Results – Chapter 3

3:1-10 - The Healing

The apostles had been working miracles following Pentecost (2:43). The event recorded here, which followed soon after Pentecost, is a prime example of the miraculous healings that occurred, not just in Jesus' lifetime, but also during the early church. It is appropriate that this is the first miracle recorded after the church began, because it so well demonstrates the nature of New Testament miracles.

3:1,2 – A man lame from his mother's womb was asking for alms at the temple gate.

Peter and John were going to the temple. Apparently the church often gathered there for group meetings (see notes on 2:46). However, most likely the apostles went to the temple regularly to preach and teach, even when the church was not assembling. The hour of prayer likely refers to a time when Jews commonly came to pray at the temple. This would be a good opportunity for preaching. This particular time of prayer was the ninth hour, or about 3:00 PM our time.

At a gate of the temple, called the Beautiful gate, they met a man who was lame from his mother's womb. This man and the healing he received help us understand much about the nature of true Bible miracles. The first characteristic we note is: ***there was abundant evidence, apparent to all, that a physical handicap or impairment truly existed.*** There was never any possibility of faked illnesses in Bible miracles, nor were the problems merely psychosomatic.

This man had never walked in his life, and he was over 40 years old (4:22). He was carried to the place of begging. Even if his physical impairments were instantaneously removed, just learning to walk would have taken a period of gradual learning.

He was laid daily at the gate of the temple to beg from the people who passed by. This demonstrates a second characteristic of miracles: ***The person who was healed was personally known by local***

people. Hundreds of people would have met this man every day for years (3:10; 4:21,22). There was no chance of a faked ailment by someone who just came to town with the miracle workers to pretend he was sick when he was not. The people knew this man was lame because they saw him day after day unable to walk. And note that the event took place at the hour of prayer, when many people would be coming. It was not done in secret where no one could check out what was done.

This event contrasts to modern so-called miracles in which people often claim miracles in cases where it is not at all apparent that the person was sick, or perhaps the problem could be just the consequence of his state of mind and could be cured if his state of mind improved, etc.

3:3-5 – The lame man expected a gift from Peter and John.

The man customarily asked alms from people at the gate of the temple, and this is what he asked of Peter and John. Alms refers to a gift or contribution to needy or poor people.

This identifies a third characteristic of Bible miracles: ***It was not necessary for the one affected by the miracle to have faith.*** This lame man was not asking or expecting anything more of Peter and John than he did of anyone else. He was expecting to receive alms, not a miracle. Even when Peter began speaking for the purpose of healing him, the man was still expecting only “silver or gold.”

Today many so-called miracle workers say they cannot work a miracle unless the one who wants the miracle has faith that the miracle worker can do it. If he tries and fails, the miracle worker blames the failure on the fact the one who wanted the miracle did not have enough faith. Such was never the case in Bible miracles.

True, some people who were healed did have faith, and sometimes their healing is even stated to be a reward for their faith. But faith was not necessary, as is demonstrated by this miracle. And there is surely no case in which the man of God tried to work miracles, failed, and then blamed it on the people’s lack of faith. If people’s faith was such that there was no point in doing miracles, the man of God knew this without having to try a miracle.

Jesus never attempted a miracle and failed, nor did the apostles ever try and fail after they received Holy Spirit baptism on Pentecost. (The only instances where they failed before Pentecost, Jesus blamed the failure on a lack of faith on the part of the apostles – the men who attempted to do the miracle – not on the part of the people who needed to be healed.)

3:6-8 – Peter denied having silver or gold, but he raised the man up so that he was leaping and walking.

Peter said, “Silver and gold have I none.”

This shows that Peter realized what the man was asking for: money, not healing.

This is also a very revealing statement in light of the Catholic claim that Peter was the first Pope. He was not Pope, as many other passages show. But this verse shows that he was certainly unlike modern Popes. The Catholic Church possesses incredible holdings of buildings, property, and even many businesses completely unrelated to any spiritual work of the church. Modern Popes serve as head of one of the wealthiest institutions on earth. They frequently wear garments or ornaments that consist of or include silver or gold. They have a super-abundance of silver and gold available to them.

The Popes cannot, however, do miracles. So that is another characteristic of modern Popes that differs from Peter: they have no power to confirm their apostleship like Peter did (2 Corinthians 12:12). So what Peter had, modern Popes do not have. And what Peter did not have, modern Popes have in abundance!

Likewise, modern “miracle workers” use their supposed power as a means of asking for contributions from people. Many of them become fabulously rich from their power. People in abject poverty are often expected to make substantial donations in order to get miracles. Here then is another characteristic of true Bible miracles which differs from many modern cases: ***True New Testament miracles were never done for the financial gain of the one who had the power to do the miracles.*** Though Peter could do miracles far greater than any modern miracle worker can do, he never became wealthy nor used the power as a means of encouraging those who wanted miracles to give him money.

Then, here is another consideration. The money that was donated by the members of the church for the care of needy people was laid at the apostles’ feet to distribute to people in need (2:44,45; 4:32-35). Peter and John were apostles. If, as some people claim, the money that had been given into their keeping was to be used for people who were not members of the church, then this lame man was the very kind of person they should have given money to. In that case, for Peter to say, “Silver and gold have I none” would have been a lie. He would have had a fair amount of silver and gold to use for just such people as this. The fact he claimed to have no silver and gold, however, proves that the money was not given to be used for non-members, but rather was limited for the use of members as the accounts state.

Peter healed the lame man in the name of Jesus.

The next characteristic of Bible miracles is that ***they were done in the name of Jesus*** – by His authority or power. Peter told the man to rise and walk “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.” The workers of miracles refused all personal glory and sought only to impress the people with Jesus and His power (3:12; 4:10; for the significance of the phrase “in the name of” see notes on 4:7-10).

Immediately after Peter’s statement, the man’s feet and ankles received strength. This shows another characteristic of miracles: ***The***

healings were always instantaneous. They occurred at the very time the worker said they would occur. There was no gradual and progressive improvement over a period of days or weeks. Nor was the worker ever in doubt as to when the miracle would occur.

By contrast, modern so-called miracle workers pretend a healing is a miracle no matter how many years it takes to gradually occur. They are often very vague and uncertain about when the miracle will occur. But if it ever occurs they claim it was a miracle.

The man then leaped up, stood, and began walking and leaping, praising God. The next characteristic of miraculous healings is that **they were always complete.** No miracle involved partial healing in which only one or two of many symptoms were removed, nor was there just a partial improvement in some symptom. Yet that is exactly what characterizes many so-called modern miracles.

Note again that, had the man simply been healed, it would have taken a long time just to learn to walk, since he had never done so in his life. But the man was not only healed but was immediately enabled to leap and walk.

Further, another characteristic is that **there was clear and overwhelming evidence that the impairment was removed.** It was physically obvious that the person was wholly healed. There was never any doubt in anyone's mind that a miracle really had occurred (compare 4:16; note 9:32-43). Again, this is often not the case in modern so-called miracles. Often there is little or no change in the outward appearance of the person, nothing that would convince the honest person that there had really been a healing at all.

3:9,10 – The people witnessed the evidence of the miracle.

The people saw this man, who had been lame, now walking and praising God, and they knew it was the same man who had been begging at the temple gate. Like Peter and John, many people were likely to be going to the temple at this time of prayer (verse 1). Many of them had done this often before, and had seen this same lame man begging at the temple gate. They knew who he was, knew he had a legitimate ailment, and now could see for themselves the evidence of his healing.

This identifies another characteristic of true miracles: **Local people were able to see for themselves that the person was really cured** and that it was the same person who they knew was really sick (compare 4:14,16,21). It was not necessary for anyone to accept an unconfirmed testimony from a single individual or an unconfirmed report of what happened years ago or thousands of miles away. Yet this latter is exactly what happens with modern so-called miracles. When miracles really happened, people could see the evidence of it among people they themselves knew.

The people were then filled with wonder and amazement. This demonstrates one final characteristic of miracles: **They were done for**

the purpose of confirming the word, to convince people that a man was really a prophet from God so they would believe his message. Mark 16:20; John 5:36; 20:30,31; Acts 2:22; 14:3; 2 Corinthians 12:11,12; Hebrews 2:3,4; 1 Kings 18:36-39. We will see that Peter, in the latter part of this chapter, used the miracle here described as a means of accomplishing this very purpose.

Notice the close relationship between the characteristics of miracles and the purpose of miracles. The nature of miracles was such that they gave overwhelming evidence that an event had occurred by the supernatural power of God. This gave conclusive proof that God's power was at work in the person through whom the miracle was done. In this way people would know the teacher was not a fraud, but his claims to be speaking for God were true. To accomplish this purpose, miracles had to be events that could not possibly be explained by human power operating according to natural law.

Such a purpose is not needed today, now that we have the written word of God as a complete revelation of God's will along with its written testimony of miracles that confirm the message is from God (2 Timothy 3:16,17; John 20:30,31). This is why miracles have ceased (1 Corinthians 13:8-11); and events people today claim to be miracles do not have the characteristic of true miracles, but are fraudulent imitations.

For further discussion of miracles and direct revelation for today, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

3:11-26 - Peter's Sermon

3:11,12 – Peter used the miracle as an opportunity to preach.

As a result of the healing of the lame man, a great crowd gathered. Peter then preached a sermon that, in many ways, is similar to that in Acts 2 on Pentecost. It adds other useful observations and information, however, about Old Testament prophecies.

“Solomon's porch” was a porch or covered area on the temple grounds. Roper says it was on the east side of the Court of the Gentiles, which in turn was a huge open area surrounding the temple grounds. The porch was 600 feet long and 60 feet deep. The Court of the Gentiles occupied 600,000 square feet. Many thousands of people could gather on the porch, and many thousands more could assemble in the court and still hear. As such, it was a suitable assembly place, so Peter used it to address the people.

This spur-of-the-moment use of this area shows how useful the temple grounds were for the early Christians in preaching and spreading the gospel. Little or no previous arrangements were apparently needed, and there was plenty of room for large crowds to meet. Also, the area often included significant numbers of people who were interested in religious matters and therefore could be influenced to listen (remember

this occurred at a time of Jewish prayer). Such an easy and ideal meeting place, with ready-made listeners, constituted a major contribution to the growth of the early church.

As in Acts 2, Peter referred to the miracle the people had just witnessed and used it as the starting point for his sermon. However, he did not dwell long on the miracle but soon turned to the deeper need of the people.

The healed man was holding on to Peter and John, no doubt as an expression of his gratitude to them. This effectively identified to all the people who the men were through whom the miracle was done. Yet the people might still wonder by what power the man had been healed. How could men be able to do such a thing when other people could not? Peter first denied that the apostles themselves had sufficient power or godliness. Then he proceeded to introduce Jesus to them; He was the true source of the power and He was the one Peter really wanted to talk to the people about.

3:13-15 – Peter said the people were responsible for the death of Jesus, but God raised him from the dead.

Peter began by identifying God as “the God of Abraham,” etc. This was a common way of identifying Jehovah, the one true God, to those who were descendants of Abraham (Matthew 22:32; etc.). Peter then proceeded, in a very few words to summarize the main points of Jesus’ life and ministry.

The people had delivered Jesus up and denied Him before Pilate, though Pilate had determined to let Him go. But they asked for a murderer to be released, and asked for Jesus to be killed (compare 2:23,24,32,33 – see notes there and on the gospel accounts of the trial before Pilate).

There was a custom at the feast for the governor to release some prisoner whomever the people wanted released (Matthew 27:15-17). Pilate offered the people a choice to have Jesus released or else a notorious man named Barabbas. Mark says Barabbas was guilty of insurrection and murder (15:7). John adds that he was a robber (John 18:40).

It is interesting that the Jews would ask (as they did) for this man to be released instead of Jesus. Barabbas was a truly evil man. He was guilty of all the evil deeds that the Jews falsely accused Jesus of committing and even more. Yet they asked for him to be released and called for the death of Jesus, whom they could prove guilty of none of these things!

Jesus was, in fact, a “Holy One” and “just.” He was righteous and innocent of all wrong doing. He had not only done nothing worthy of death, but He had never committed any sin of any kind (Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:21f; etc.). He was the “Prince of life,” yet the Jews took away His life. These terms identify Jesus as the Messiah (compare Acts 2:27; 4:27; Mark 1:24; Luke 1:35; 4:34; etc.). Yet the people determined He should die and they asked Pilate to kill Him.

But God raised Him up. Here again Peter, as in Acts 2, insisted that the people must know who Jesus really is, and must be given evidence that it is true. His first proof in this sermon is Jesus' resurrection. The evidence of the resurrection, as in Acts 2 and throughout the book of Acts, is the eyewitness testimony of the apostles.

Note the contrast between how the people treated Jesus and how He should have been treated. There is a similar contrast today.

The People's Conduct	The Proper Conduct
Verse 13 – Delivered Him up	God Glorified Him
Verses 13-15 – Denied Him and asked for a murderer	Pilate determined to release Him
Verse 15— Killed Jesus	God raised Him from the dead

Note that Peter again left no doubt that the Jewish people were responsible for Jesus' death. The Romans also shared in the blame. This does not prove that any Jew today is guilty or should be held personally responsible. But any attempt to deny the guilt of the first-century Jews would be futile. The gospel accounts repeatedly and plainly affirm their guilt.

3:16,17 – Faith in Jesus had resulted in the healing of the lame man.

The second proof Peter offered to convince the people to believe in Jesus was the miracle they had just witnessed. They had seen a man healed whom they all knew had been lame from his mother's womb. Peter assured them that Jesus was who He claimed to be, because He was the one who had given the power for the lame man to be healed. Again, the purpose of miracles was to confirm the word of the man through whom they were done (see verses 9,10).

“Faith in His name” does not refer to any faith that the lame man had. We saw that he had no idea that a healing was even under consideration (verses 3,4). It was the apostles who had the faith. Those who did the miracles were generally required to have faith, but not those on whom the miracle was done.

The killing of Jesus was done in ignorance, both on the part of the people and the rulers.

But in what sense were they ignorant? They could not claim that they had no opportunity to know the truth. The rulers and most of the people had seen many proofs that Jesus was the Messiah. Yet they were still ignorant in that they did not realize He really was the Messiah. They did not knowingly kill the Christ. They thought they were killing a fraud.

They were guilty of willful ignorance in that they had received evidence but had refused to believe it. They were not ignorant of the evidence, but they were ignorant of the conclusion that the evidence should

have led them to accept. Note that, contrary to the arguments of some, ignorance is no excuse. Though they committed the act in ignorance, yet they were murderers, sinners, in need of conversion and forgiveness. Surely if there is any point in Acts 2 and Acts 3 it is that God held these sinners accountable for their sin of ignorance. (Compare verse 19; Acts 17:30; 1 Timothy 1:12,13.)

There is never any excuse for sinning against God. The universe testifies that He exists, so we should search after Him and find Him, which can be done if we truly seek (Romans 1:20; Acts 17:27; Matthew 5:6; 7:7ff; 1 Peter 1:22-25).

3:18 – Christ suffered as predicted by the prophets.

Peter then introduced his third major proof of Jesus' claims: fulfilled prophecy. Note that he offered the same three proofs here as in Acts 2 and elsewhere. These are the same proofs we should offer to convince people to believe in Jesus.

A prophet is a man who speaks God's will by direct guidance of the Holy Spirit. One thing the Old Testament prophets predicted was that Christ would suffer and die (Acts 2:22-36; compare Isaiah 53; Luke 24:46; Acts 17:3; 26:23; 1 Corinthians 15:3; 1 Peter 1:10,11; Zechariah 12:10; 13:7). And sure enough, the people had killed Him. This meant that, not only should they feel guilt for having killed Him, but also they should recognize that this act confirmed Jesus to be the Christ God intended to send. They were wrong to reject Him, but by that very act they gave additional proof that He was from God!

Note again that God knew all along that the Messiah would suffer. This was a fact the people had not anticipated, for they had sought a great ruling king. Yet amazingly, modern premillennialists still make the same mistake. They still believe, even after the fact, that God never expected the Messiah to suffer or die. They claim that the Jews' rejection of Jesus required an unexpected change in God's plan, so He postponed the kingdom and substituted the church. Inspiration says this is nonsense. God knew all along, and had in fact predicted by the prophets, that Jesus would suffer and die as a consequence of rejection by the people. (See further notes on Acts 2.)

3:19 – People must repent and be converted so their sins may be blotted out.

This verse is a close parallel to Acts 2:38. In both cases Peter, by inspiration, told people in sin (specifically those who killed Jesus) what to do to be forgiven of sin. Having convicted them of sin, he said they must repent (see notes on 2:38).

Note that faith is not expressly mentioned, though we know it is required. The fact a condition is not expressly mentioned in one verse does not mean we may overlook the fact that it is required by another passage. So, the fact confession and baptism are not here expressly mentioned

does not eliminate their necessity, since we find them required elsewhere.

In addition to repenting, those who seek forgiveness must also “be converted” (or “turn again” – ASV). Conversion is the change of life or conduct that results from the change of mind in repentance. The parallel to Acts 2:38 shows that being converted requires one to be baptized (after confessing Jesus – Romans 10:9,10). This changes one’s state before God because sins are blotted out (remitted – 2:38) so one comes into Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3), into His church (1 Corinthians 12:13), and hence into covenant relationship or fellowship with God (see notes on 2:38).

Since “conversion” in Acts 3:19 stands in the same place relative to forgiveness as “baptism” stands in Acts 2:38, it follows that baptism is essential to conversion. No one can truly be converted without Scriptural baptism. The parallel in Peter’s two sermons confirms this beyond honest doubt.

The times of refreshing

What are the “times of refreshing” (“seasons of refreshing” – ASV) that come from the presence of the Lord. There are various views.

(1) Henry says it is the blessings of refreshment and rest in Heaven (2 Thessalonians 1:7; Hebrews 4:1).

(2) Barnes says it is all the blessings and privileges we receive, both in this life and that to come, as a result of the gospel and salvation in Jesus. In other words, it is the sum total of all aspects of our relationship with God because we have been converted. These times of refreshing come to us because our sins are blotted out, thereby removing the barrier that prevented us from having God’s blessings.

(3) Lenski emphasizes the “seasons” concept, as though there are times in our lives when we have refreshment and other times not so refreshing. He says it is the times of peace within and perhaps prayer and closeness to God when we reflect on God’s blessings and appreciate them, in contrast to times of temptation and hardship in God’s service.

(4) McGarvey says, making a direct parallel to Acts 2:38, it is the gift of the Holy Spirit. But this idea is not much different from Barnes’ (see notes on Acts 2:38).

None of these views does violence to Scripture in that all these things are true and all do come as a result of conversion. Lenski’s view seems too limited: we do have “down times” in serving God, but it does not seem that God is here promising something that comes and goes. Barnes’ view is the most comprehensive, including all the other ideas, and seems the most reasonable to me. “Refreshing” can refer to the same idea as “all things are made new” for those who are born again – 2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 6:3,4; John 3:3,5; 1 Peter 1:22; Galatians 3:26,27.

3:20,21 – Christ would be received into heaven till the times of restoration.

Many sects have claimed that this passage is a prophecy of their organization which, they say, constitutes “the restoration of all things.” However, the things restored were spoken of by God through Old Testament prophets. So, there must be evidence of Old Testament prophecies regarding the things referred to here. Further, v24 shows that Peter refers here to prophecies about “these days,” including the first century when Peter was alive. To just pick some events and claim, without proof, that they are the things referred to here, would constitute a perversion of the passage.

What are the “things” that are to be restored?

Some (Henry, Lenski) say it refers to the second coming of Jesus when the new heavens and new earth will be restored. This approach assumes that the verses are saying Jesus will remain in heaven until, when He comes, He will achieve the restoration of all things. This is a possible meaning, but in what sense would the conversion of Peter’s hearers be part of or relate to bringing this about (see connection between verses 19,20)? This also seems to conflict with verses 22-26 where Peter showed that the blessings predicted by the prophets were being already fulfilled in his own day to the very people he was addressing.

Others (Barnes) say this refers to Jesus’ first coming which had already occurred at the time Peter was speaking. This was surely prophesied in the Old Testament and constituted a restitution of all things. It could also fit with verses 22-26. But why would Peter use future tense “that he may send...”? Barnes responds by comparing this to Matthew 17:11,12 (“Elijah indeed comes and shall restore all things”), yet Jesus immediately states Elijah (John) had already come. The idea would be that the events were future tense from the viewpoints of the **prophets**, so Peter speaks in terms that fit the events as viewed in the future from the prophets’ time. But from Peter’s own standpoint, it was a restitution already accomplished by what Jesus had done.

These views do no violence to Scripture, but I prefer a slightly different meaning. While Jesus was in heaven after his ascension, all things were being restored by the work of the apostles through the preaching of the gospel. The things restored refer to man’s relationship to God and all the blessings this involves. This fits the context (verses 19,24ff), and it was surely prophesied by Old Testament prophets. When the gospel had been preached resulting in men being restored to God’s service, the prophecies will be fulfilled and Jesus will then be able, at any time, to return for His second coming.

This views the language as saying that Jesus’ coming will not bring about the restoration, but rather things are being restored while He remains in heaven and He will remain there until that work of restoration has accomplished all that God intended for it. I might paraphrase that

Jesus will continue in heaven till the time when the work had been completed that restored all things as they had been predicted by the prophets. (Compare Stringer.)

When Adam and Eve sinned, man's relationship with God was ruined bringing on man all the spiritual consequences of sin (Genesis 3:1-15). The gospel restores man's relationship with God. When it has been preached and God concludes that men have been given adequate opportunity to be restored to His favor, Jesus will return. So, the "times of restoration" is just an expression for the gospel age.

3:22,23 – Moses predicted a prophet like himself. All must heed all things spoken by that prophet or be destroyed.

One particular Old Testament prophet who spoke of these times was Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-19). He predicted a prophet like himself. Again, as with verse 21, some people seek to apply this to some modern-day leader (Joseph Smith, etc.) saying he is the prophet predicted here. But there is no evidence that the passage refers to any such leader subsequent to the first-century. All such speculation is unfounded, perverts Scripture, and leads men to accept false teachers.

The context discusses the work of Jesus. Verses 24-26 clearly show that the Old Testament prophecies under discussion were fulfilled in Him. Acts 7:37 shows several specific parallels between Moses and Jesus. Both were prophets. But more, both were lawgivers in the sense that each revealed a completely different dispensation or arrangement revealed from God to guide men's lives: Moses gave the Law of Moses and Jesus gave the gospel. Both delivered their people from bondage and led them to a promised land of rest – Moses physically and Jesus spiritually. Both confirmed their teaching by great miracles. So, Jesus, not any subsequent teacher, is the prophet who fulfilled this prediction of Moses.

Further, we must listen to Jesus in all things He says or be destroyed (compare Matthew 17:5; Hebrews 1:1,2). It is not enough just to say, "I accept Him as my personal Savior." I must obey His will or be destroyed. This was a severe warning Peter gave the Jews of his day, and it is likewise a severe warning for us and people of our day. We are not saved by "faith only." To avoid destruction, we must obey Jesus' teachings.

Furthermore, I have no right to pick and choose what I want to obey, then ignore the rest. I must study it all, accept it all as true, and obey all that He teaches. Here is a major passage showing that God's people must respect all the teaching of Jesus regarding our lives. People are severely mistaken when they think they can be saved by partial obedience or by emphasizing the things they think are "important" and ignoring the rest. See Matthew 28:18-20; 4:4,7; James 2:10.

3:24 – Peter says "all the prophets" spoke of "these days."

The passages he referred to were not fulfilled hundreds of years later, nor will they be fulfilled at or shortly before the time Jesus returns.

They were already being fulfilled in Peter's time. He said this was true of "all" of them beginning with Samuel and those who followed him. (Note that Luke probably records only part of Peter's sermon. Perhaps Peter actually cited other prophecies that Luke does not record.)

Premillennialism claims that the kingdom has not been established even today but will be when Jesus comes again. So, they believe the prophecies about Christ will be fulfilled, not during the days that included Peter's time, but many centuries later. Such a use of prophecy is a perversion, for Peter says they were all fulfilled in his day.

3:25,26 – The promise that all nations would be blessed in the seed of Abraham was fulfilled in the forgiveness of sins through Christ.

Here Peter went even further back than Moses and Samuel (verses 22-24). He referred to the very covenant God made with Abraham that all nations would be blessed in his seed. Peter makes clear that this very prophecy was being fulfilled to the people he was speaking to ("to you first ... to bless you").

Further, he shows that the blessing involved turning them away from their sins (verse 26). This is probably the clearest passage of Scripture anywhere showing the meaning and fulfillment of this promise to Abraham. It explains that the blessing God promised on all nations was salvation from sin (2 Timothy 2:10; Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 5:8,9; etc.). And the seed through whom it was brought was Jesus Christ (compare Genesis 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14 to Galatians 3:8,13,14,16).

Again, premillennialists miss this point when they claim that this promise to Abraham is not yet fulfilled. Here Peter by inspiration plainly says it had been fulfilled to people in his day.

Those people should have greatly rejoiced to find that they could witness in their own day the fulfillment of all these prophecies they had been hoping to see fulfilled. They were the "first" to receive these blessings, though others throughout history would also. However, instead of appreciating this blessing, many continued to reject Christ and His gospel. But some did obey, and we today must be among the number of the obedient if we are to receive the blessings.

The plan of God had been prepared and prophesied throughout history. God intended all along to send Jesus to offer men forgiveness of sin. He had used the nation of Israel, in fulfillment of His promise to Abraham, to bring Christ to be our Savior. He then used the Jews and the Romans to kill the Son as the sacrifice for our sins. It is a serious mistake to think all this was unplanned and unexpected. Jesus' death and resurrection are the focus of all history. Only through him can we be saved.

Acts 4

The Beginning of Persecution – Chapter 4 & 5

4:1-22 - The First Arrest

4:1,2 – The rulers arrested Peter and John for teaching the people about the resurrection.

The apostles had simply been preaching to the people as a result of a great miracle. Until this time, the people had looked favorably on the Christians (2:47). But here for the first time persecution began. This was the beginning of a long history of persecution against Christians.

The priests and Sadducees and captain of the temple were the ones who were disturbed by the apostles' preaching, and they motivated the arrest. The only reasons stated for their being disturbed were that the apostles taught the people and specifically they taught in Jesus the resurrection of the dead (i.e., that Jesus had been raised.)

Rulers would naturally be interested whenever a group of people suddenly began to grow rapidly. Are these people harmless or are they rabble rousers who may eventually create disturbances? This was especially a concern in the areas controlled by a hated foreign power. However, these were the religious leaders of the people and their motivations had to do with their standing as religious leaders, not with any desire to help the Romans avoid problems.

Several reasons for their concern can be suggested: (1) They sought the glory of the people. They wanted a following for themselves and wanted to share with no new upstarts. The growth of the church would be seen as competition to the favored status of these rulers before the people. This is why they had killed Jesus. They would object to the disciples' teaching just as they had in Jesus' case (Matthew 27:18). Specifically, they knew Jesus had been a threat to their power, but they thought they were rid of Jesus when they killed Him. Now here His disciples were again stirring up the people and gaining a following as great as He had!

(2) The apostles had accused the leaders of killing Jesus though He was innocent (3:13-17; 2:23). This would severely damage the image of

these leaders in the eyes of the people (4:21). However, there is no evidence the rulers were concerned over the fact they had committed an injustice or wanted to atone for the fact they had murdered an innocent man. The only concern was that other people might find out and make them look bad! (4:17-21).

(3) The claim of the resurrection of Jesus was specifically something the rulers had wanted to avoid (Matthew 27:62-66; 28:11-15) for fear it would gain an even greater following for Jesus than He had to begin with.

(4) These rulers in particular were Sadducees who denied that there even was such a thing as resurrection from the dead (Acts 23:8; see notes on Matthew 22:23ff). The teaching of the apostles that Jesus had been raised, not only contradicted Sadducee doctrine, but gave fundamental proof that it was error. Again, they were not interested in the truth of the case: if He had really been raised, then they were in error and needed to repent. Instead, they just wanted to maintain their image by stopping the spread of the doctrine.

Note that, since these Jewish leaders were upset by the preaching of the resurrection, this was the perfect time for them to offer whatever evidence they had to disprove the resurrection. There would be no better time. Why not nip this fledgling movement in the bud, if possible? The most effective way would be to disprove the resurrection. The very fact that they offered not a single argument against the resurrection shows they had no proof against it. If the resurrection could not be disproved by the people who were closest to it and knew the most about the circumstances involved, what are the chances anyone in later years – even thousands of years later – could successfully disprove it?

4:3,4 – The apostles were put in custody, but the number of believers continued to increase.

It was evening by the time they had arrested the apostles, so they could make no decision about them. Instead they just put them in custody till the next day.

But the preaching had its effect. Many people who heard the word believed. Note the connection between believing and preaching, especially the message about miracles. Giving evidence to persuade people to believe was the purpose of miracles (see notes on 3:9,10). And specifically it was the purpose of the preaching that accompanied miracles (Romans 10:13-17). The miracles were to confirm the message, and the message was to lead people to understand Jesus' gospel, believe it, and obey it. These purposes were accomplished through this great miracle and the preaching that followed.

In spite of the rulers' opposition, the number of disciples came to be 5000 men (this implies women and children were not included in the number – this is typical of counting in those days – Matthew 14:21). Note the rapid growth of the disciples: 3000 were converted on the day of

Pentecost (2:41), then many more were added daily (2:47), till here just a short time later the total was 5000 men.

4:5-7 – The council convened and asked the apostles by what power they had done the miracle.

The following morning the rulers and elders, including the High Priests and their relatives, assembled to consider Peter and John's case. This group almost surely constituted the Sanhedrin council, which was the highest Jewish court in that day. Annas and Caiaphas are listed as high priests in other accounts, especially regarding the trials of Jesus before His crucifixion. So in facing this council, Peter and John found themselves being tried by the very group who, a short time before, had determined to kill their Master. Surely this would be an intimidating, fearful circumstance, especially to these men who, only shortly before had forsaken Jesus. And in Peter's case, he had stood by and repeatedly denied Jesus as He stood on trial before this very group of men!

The rulers asked by what power or in what name the apostles had acted. This evidently referred to the healing of the lame man, and perhaps to the preaching done subsequently. This is a question concerning authority. Honestly asked, it could be a good question. However, it is not always honestly asked, and so was not always answered directly – Matthew 21:23-27.

In this case, the motives behind the question were completely improper, as the subsequent record demonstrates. Most likely the rulers were simply fishing for the apostles to say something they could use against them. Note that they did not begin by making an accusation, nor did they at any point introduce evidence of any kind against the apostles. They evidently had no evidence nor even any real charge. They simply objected to His teaching.

4:8-10 – Peter said the man had been healed by the power of Christ, whom they had crucified but God had raised.

Guided by the Holy Spirit (verse 8 – compare Matthew 10:19,20), Peter gave a plain bold answer. He first implied the unreasonableness of treating men as if they may be criminals because they did "a good deed" by healing a lame man. This, of course, pointed out the false motives of the rulers. Courts were for trying criminals and people who may be guilty of evil deeds. Why would anyone, who really cared about people, call men into court for healing a sick man? They would do it only if they had ulterior motives.

Then Peter plainly answered that the power to heal the man came from Jesus of Nazareth (compare 3:12ff). In so answering, He boldly convicted these rulers of having killed Jesus. These were courageous words for one who had denied Jesus three times just a short time earlier (compare 2:23; 3:13-17). Often we are fearful and hesitant to tell people of their sins, especially if they are powerful and influential people. We

should not be deliberately offensive and insulting, but we must let people know when they are guilty of sin.

Peter also affirmed that Jesus had been raised from the dead. This is what the apostles had been sent to preach, but it was this preaching of Jesus as resurrected that especially upset the rulers (verse 2). Peter did not compromise or back away from the very issue that was at the heart of the real reason why they were arrested. This is exactly what the people needed to hear, so he preached it boldly.

This context presents an excellent definition of the expression “in the name of.”

In verse 7, the rulers asked the apostles “by what name” they healed the lame man. In verse 10 Peter responded that it was “in the name of” Jesus. But other expressions used show the significance of the expression.

“By what power or in what name” (verse 7) = “by what means” (verse 9) = “in the name of Jesus ... in Him” (verse 10). So, “in the name of” is equivalent to by the **power** or by the **means**. It refers to authority, will, or might.

This point is helpful in understanding passages that discuss miracles or baptism (Acts 2:38 compare to Matthew 28:19). When we understand that “in the name of” means by the authority or power of, then we understand that it is not primarily a matter that only one specific word (such as “Jesus”) may be used when a person is baptized. And we do not argue that “in the name” means that Jesus and His Father are the same person, but wearing different names. We realize that the reference is to the **power** or **authority** which authorizes or commands a certain act to be done. Baptism is in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19) and in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38), not because the three are the same person, but because they all possess Deity and therefore have the authority of Deity. The will or power of one is the same as the will or power of the others. So to act in the name of one is to act in the name of all three, because they all have the same will, authority, or power, not because they are the same person.

So, Colossians 3:17 says all we do must be done in the name of the Lord. This refers to the authority by which we act, not to the fact that we must constantly be saying Jesus’ name for everything we do.

Acts 4:12 then shows further that the same “name” that healed the lame man is the only “name” in whom we can be saved.

4:11 – Jesus had been rejected by the rulers but had become the chief cornerstone.

Several verses refer to Jesus as the chief cornerstone and/or to the stone rejected by builders: Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10,11; Luke 20:17; Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:4-8; compare Romans 9:33; Isaiah 28:16; 8:14.

This refers to Psalm 118:22, and Peter here gives the clearest explanation of any of these passages regarding what is meant by the rejection of the stone. Peter says the prophecy refers to the fact that “you the builders” – i.e., the Jewish rulers – rejected Jesus by crucifying Him (verse 10). Nevertheless, God raised Him from the dead and made Him “head of the corner” or chief cornerstone.

Jesus was the most important stone in God’s spiritual house, the one which all other blocks must depend on in order to be useful (compare 1 Peter 2:4-8). He was, in other words, the Christ sent by God to save and rule His people. But the Jewish leaders did not recognize Him and instead murdered Him. This is exactly what God knew and prophesied would happen. But despite the rejection by the Jews, God still made Him the foundation or chief cornerstone of His kingdom, the church.

Note again how all this contradicts much premillennial theory. That theory, as held by many, claims that God did not expect Jesus to be rejected and killed by the Jews, so when it happened God had to change His plans and send Jesus back again later to establish His kingdom. But this passage, like many others, shows that God had prophesied long ahead of time that the people would reject Jesus.

4:12 – Salvation is available only through Jesus, not in any other name.

No Savior other than Jesus can save. No name (power or authority – compare verses 7-10) other than His can give salvation (compare 1 Timothy 2:5,6; Matthew 1:21; John 3:16; 8:24; 14:6; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 10:43). So, no one can be saved by any man or by any system that fails to recognize Jesus as Savior. Peter was here clearly applying this to these Jews who did not believe in Jesus, and the same applies to Jews today who likewise deny who He really is. But the same principle applies to those who seek salvation through Mohammed, Buddha, Confucius, Satan, etc., or people who for whatever reason are not willing to turn to Jesus for salvation.

Further, the gospel is the message that reveals Jesus and salvation through Him (Romans 1:16). So, no one can be saved who does not accept that gospel, or who changes it and preaches a different gospel (Galatians 1:8,9). Anyone who teaches a different system, therefore, has left the only way he can be truly saved (Romans 10:1-3). Salvation is not in the Pope, Martin Luther, etc. Even true teachers must not be exalted to the point that we would follow them or emphasize them above merely being the messengers that reveal the true gospel. Salvation is therefore not in Paul, Peter, etc.

Often people tell us, “There is nothing in a name.” But salvation is in Jesus’ name (authority) and in none other. If there is nothing in a name, could we be just as easily saved in the name of Buddha or even Satan? Names matter because they stand for a person and his authority, will, and power.

Note further how narrow the gospel is. There is one and only one Savior. All others are pretenders and frauds. To many people this is much too strict: they say we must be “broad-minded” and believe that all sincere religious people will be saved. But such was never taught by Jesus nor His inspired followers. They all taught salvation is narrow, and we must strictly follow Jesus’ teachings to receive it (Matthew 7:13,14).

4:13 – Despite having no formal training, Peter and John impressed the rulers.

The rulers were amazed that the apostles spoke so boldly despite the fact they were uneducated and untrained (“unlearned and ignorant” – KJV). This means that they had no formal training and education in the schools designed to train men to be religious teachers. It does not mean they had no education at all (the inspired books they wrote prove otherwise), nor that they did not know what they were talking about. On the contrary, the amazing thing was how convincingly they argued their case despite the fact that they lacked formal training.

The rulers realized that the apostles had this ability because they had been with Jesus. They had been trained by His words and example. If we will spend time with Jesus by reading of His life and teachings, we too can gain the ability to know what to say, how to say it, why it needs to be said, and we will have the courage to speak it as these apostles did.

Many people today think preachers need formal education, and often they dismiss teaching that comes from one who never went to a seminary. The apostles and Jesus Himself (Mark 6:2,3; John 7:14-17) demonstrate that such training is not necessary. God’s word can be understood by the average person who studies it diligently (Mark 7:14; Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 3:16,17). If men will spend time with Jesus through His revealed word, then like the apostles, we can boldly proclaim the truth regardless of formal training in theology, philosophy, etc. (Matthew 11:25; 1 Corinthians 1:18ff; 2 Timothy 2:15). So much is this the case that Peter and John, despite their lack of formal training, were able to answer the most learned Jewish leaders, boldly accusing them of sin, in such a way that these leaders were totally unable to respond (verse 14).

4:14-16 – The rulers could not deny that the miracle occurred.

When the rulers had heard Peter’s defense, they had a decision to make. They asked the apostles to be taken outside the council meeting, then they deliberated among themselves. Note that they had called these men to trial without even a charge against them. Now they have been accused to their faces of a great miscarriage of justice amounting to murder, and they are speechless: they could say nothing. Such was the power of the apostles’ message.

Though clearly opposed to the preaching of the apostles, the rulers could not disprove the miracle. (1) The man was present, standing in their midst (verse 14). They could not claim he had not been healed. (2)

All the people knew the facts so that the miracle was evident to all (verse 16). (3) All men glorified God for the healing (verse 21). (4) The man was over 40 years old (verse 22), having been lame all his life (3:2), yet he was now able to stand with the apostles in the rulers' midst. (5) The result was that the rulers could say nothing to disprove the miracle (verse 14). They could not deny it (verse 16). Here you have absolute concrete evidence that a true miracle had occurred. It was known fact, not hearsay, and the opponents of the gospel had no choice but to admit it.

So convincing were Bible miracles that even enemies and opponents of the doctrine could not disprove them.

Bible miracles were often done in the presence of enemies (see Acts 8:5-13; 13:6-12; 9:1-18; John 11:47,48; 1 Kings 18:20-40; Exodus 8:17-19; Matthew 12:22-24; Luke 5:17-26; 6:6-11; 13:10-17; etc.). Yet those enemies could neither duplicate the miracles nor disprove them. The incredible thing is that these men were so hard-hearted and hypocritical that, though they acknowledged the occurrence of the miracle, they could not bring themselves to accept the obvious conclusion that these men were telling the truth. They ought to have confessed Jesus to be the Son of God and sought how to be forgiven of their guilt. Instead, they chose to persecute the messengers.

This shows a major contrast to those who claim the power to do miracles today. Often these claim to do miracles just like in the Bible, but they will not even attempt a miracle in the presence of one whom they claim is an unbeliever or an opponent. And if we deny their miracles, they cannot give overwhelming evidence which cannot be disproved. On the contrary, we continue to deny their miracles are genuine because they do not possess the characteristics of Bible miracles.

Note that we are not denying Bible miracles occurred, but only that so-called miracles of today are really miracles. True miracles have ceased because they accomplished their purpose and are no longer needed (compare 1 Corinthians 13:8-11).

For further discussion of miracles and direct revelation for today, see our articles on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

4:17,18 – The rulers determined to threaten the apostles to keep quiet about Jesus.

The rulers had no grounds to prosecute the apostles. The apostles had only healed a man miraculously, and this could not be disproved. Despite the fact they had been accused of killing an innocent man, the rulers had no legal means to prosecute the apostles.

But of greatest concern to them, apparently, was the fact the people all favored the apostles for the great miracle done. They all glorified God (verse 21). But the rulers were not willing to drop the matter, let alone admit they had been wrong, so they decided to bluff and try to intimidate

the apostles. They determined to threaten the apostles and demand that they no longer preach and teach in the name of Jesus.

But by making this ruling, though it was completely groundless and without merit, the rulers gave themselves a basis for future action if the apostles continued to preach. They could claim that the apostles had disobeyed their rule and penalize them in the future (as they eventually did in chapter 5). These rulers had great power. They recently had Jesus killed. As a result, the apostles faced serious temptation to compromise and agree to keep quiet.

Unfortunately, people in places of influence and power today still prefer threats and intimidation as one of their favorite tactics to silence those who stand for truth. They threaten good people with loss of jobs, fines, imprisonment, and even physical violence. What would we have done in the apostles' place? How long will it be until we are threatened as these men were, and how will we respond?

McGarvey discusses the question of how the disciples (and specifically Luke) learned about this discussion, since they were not present to hear it. He points out that various people, who could have been present or could have spoken to those who were present, were later converted and could have reported what happened. This included Saul (who was a student of Gamaliel and may himself have been a council member) and many priests (6:7). Of course, Luke was inspired, so God would know. Nevertheless, Luke generally sought to act as a witness or a historian using the testimony of witnesses as sources for his inspired record.

4:19,20 – The apostles refused to keep silent, saying they must hearken to God rather than the counsel.

Despite the fact the rulers commanded them to quit preaching, Peter and John replied courageously that they had to continue to speak the message of God. Christians are responsible to obey civil rulers (Romans 13:1ff; 1 Peter 2:13-17). But we must not obey them if they command us to sin against God, disobeying His will. Rulers do have authority and we are required to respect it. But God's authority is higher. We must obey His commands, even if this requires us to disobey human authorities (compare Acts 5:29).

Note that this does not justify us in disobeying rulers simply because we do not like a law or because the rulers themselves commit a sin. The rulers had ordered the apostles to do something which, had they done it, would constitute disobedience to God's commands. This is the only circumstance in which we may disobey the law of the land. And in this case we **must** disobey (compare Galatians 1:10; Matthew 10:35-39).

While we ourselves may disobey only if we are commanded to sin, yet if the rulers are sinning, we are obligated to tell them they are wrong. Some today argue that Christians should not rebuke rulers who make evil laws or commit sin. To do so, they say, would mix politics and religion. But the issue here is, not politics, but Bible principle and Divine

command! This is just one of many Bible examples in which faithful preachers rebuked rulers for their sins (compare Moses and Pharaoh, Nathan and David, Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar, John and Herod – Matthew 14:1ff; etc.).

Note how important this makes gospel preaching. Peter said they could do nothing but speak the message. They could not stop even for the command of these rulers. Nothing must stop the preaching of the gospel. If we must flee, let us flee to escape harm. But let us never quit preaching (Compare Mark 16:15,16; Acts 1:8; 2 Timothy 4:2-4; etc.).

Also notice the attitude these men had in the face of persecution. They did not apologize for the message, as we might be tempted to do. They did not compromise, nor tone down the message, let alone did they deny the truth of what had been taught. They simply appealed to the authority of God and trusted Him to help them through the problem. This is exactly what we today must do in such cases.

Finally, note the teaching method used by Peter and John here. They appealed to the conscience and sense of justice of their opponents. The men knew God's law well enough to know that God's servants cannot quit doing His will just because people tell them to quit. We cannot put human authority above Divine authority. The rulers' command was unjust, so the apostles reminded them of this. This is an effective method for us to use in teaching: appeal to the conscience of our opponents and their sense of right and wrong, when we have reason to know they would conscientiously know the truth.

4:21,22 – After further threats, the rulers released the apostles.

The rulers finally let the apostles go, not because they realized they had done wrong to arrest them, but because they could not convict the apostles of wrongdoing and because the people favored the apostles and glorified God for the healing. Here is where we are told that the man healed had been over forty years old, having never walked in his life (see notes on 3:1ff).

Note the political and selfish motives of these rulers. As demonstrated when they crucified Jesus, they did not care about the right and wrong of the matter, let alone the justice of it. The only issue to them was what they could get away with for their own self-advancement. They had always been motivated mainly by a desire to please the people and to save their own position of honor and power over the people (compare Matthew 6:1ff; 23:1ff).

The apostles had raised the issue that these rulers had killed an innocent man and had given evidence by their miracle that Jesus was who they claimed Him to be. Yet the rulers indicated no concern about the spiritual truth of this, nor about the consequences to their relationship to God, nor about the injustice done to an innocent man and His followers. All they cared about was their own self-aggrandizement.

The rulers made no effort to refute the resurrection.

Note that these rulers not only could not refute the miracle done by the apostles, they made no effort whatever to refute the claim that Jesus had been raised from the dead, despite the fact that this was one of their main objections to what the apostles had preached (verse 2).

These men had every reason in the world to refute this claim, since they did not believe it and since it threatened their position before the people. Further, they were in the best position of anyone in history to refute it, if it could be refuted. They were personally and directly involved in the situation. They had the authority to perform whatever investigation they desired. But they made no claims at all against it.

This speaks volumes for the evidence for the resurrection. The people who lived in that day and who knew the facts of the case, either believed in Jesus as a result or else made no effort to refute the claims. If the greatest enemies of the resurrection in that day could not refute it, what makes any enemy today, 2000 years later, think he can refute it?

4:23-31 - The Disciples' Prayer for Strength

4:23 – Peter and John met with their companions and reported what happened.

Having been released from custody, the apostles went to the other Christians and told them all that had happened. Together they then joined in prayer and praise to God, asking strength to be faithful and do God's will despite the threats and persecution.

This example shows us what to do when we suffer. Far too often we feel sorry for ourselves and tend to back off from our commitment to be with other Christians. Some, when they suffer, become negligent in attending the services and some quit altogether. Instead, the apostles saw this as all the more reason to meet and be with other Christians.

We need the strength we can find in one another's companionship and encouragement. This is one of the main reasons God commanded assemblies (Hebrews 10:23-25). There is strength and encouragement to be found in association with other disciples (compare Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Matthew 10:1ff; plurality of elders, etc.). When our daily lives surround us with unbelievers, temptation, and evil, what a blessing to meet with brothers and sisters of like faith to draw strength from one another!

Also note that this is almost certainly an example of Christians meeting to pray and encourage one another at a time other than a regular first-day-of-the-week assembly for the Lord's Supper. The apostles had been arrested on the way to an hour of prayer (3:1), then they had been held overnight (4:3,5). After a hearing, they were released. Then they met with other disciples. What are the chances this just happened to be the time the disciples were already meeting for the Lord's Supper? Meetings at other times are authorized and beneficial. It is the responsibility

of the church to decide when and how often to have such meetings as needed.

(Note that some commentators conclude that this refers only to the apostles, because verse 31 says they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word with boldness. But there is no requirement that this be only the apostles. Soon we will see evidence that disciples besides the apostles received direct guidance of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of apostles' hands. The bold preaching was likely done subsequent to this meeting as they spoke to people in the community – 8:4. On the other hand, “filled” with the Holy Spirit may refer simply to the fact that people completely allowed the teaching of the Holy Spirit to control their lives – Ephesians 5:18; compare Acts 5:3. If so, this would apply to the whole congregation.)

4:24 – The group turned to God in prayer.

This passage gives us an excellent definition of prayer. At the conclusion of the prayer in verse 31, the record says they had “prayed.” Verse 24 says they “raised their voice to God.” So, prayer is man speaking to God.

It is also an excellent example of the content of prayer and of what our attitude and approach should be when we face hardship and opposition for the cause of Christ. Note that first they praised God. They expressed faith in Him and honor for Him. They did not begin by feeling sorry for themselves and pouring out their woes. They first talked about who God is.

They said He is the Creator of heaven, earth, sea, and everything in them. This is just one of many Bible passages that confirm the doctrine of creation (compare Genesis 1:1ff; John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Acts 17:24f; etc.). The existence of creation confirms the existence and power of God (Romans 1:20; Psalm 19:1). Only the Creator can be the true God. Any “god” that did not or could not create the entire universe, cannot possibly be the true God.

Likewise, when we face hardship and opposition, we should begin by placing trust in God. Instead of thinking about how strong our opponents are or how weak we are, we need to remember how strong our God is. Faith in ourselves is weak when we face powerful enemies. But to God no enemy is powerful. If we are on His side, what does it matter who opposes us (Romans 8:31-39)?

McGarvey points out that this is an example of unity in prayer. The prayer was surely an expression of the thoughts of the moment, not a prepared or memorized prayer. It necessarily follows (though not specifically stated) that one man worded this prayer while the others followed along, expressing the sentiments to God in their hearts (or possibly more than one led, but it would have necessarily been in turn while the others remained silent). Yet the passage says “they raised their voice to God,” demonstrating the concept of joint worship in which one person

acts physically while the others join in by spiritual harmony with what is done. As Stringer says, “When all the people in a group agree to the words of the one who is leading them in prayer, his voice is the voice of the group. All who are in the group lift up their voice through him.”

4:25,26 – David had predicted that kings and rulers would oppose God and Christ.

The disciples reminded one another that what was happening was a fulfillment of Scripture. David had been inspired to say long beforehand that these very things would happen.

Note that they viewed this passage of Scripture as being what **God** said by the mouth of David. It was not David’s human idea, nor did he express it as he wished. It was God who said it using David’s mouth. This is an excellent definition of inspiration; and it confirms, as do so many other passages, that the Bible is inspired by God.

The passage they quoted was Psalm 2:1,2. It prophesied persecution against God and His anointed One (the Christ or Messiah). The Gentiles (“nations”), kings, and rulers would oppose His work. But their plotting and imaginings were “vain”: empty and worthless. They could not defeat God’s plan no matter how hard they tried.

God’s work has always, to greater or lesser extent, been opposed by men. And often it is rulers who oppose it because they see in it some threat to their own power. The disciples saw the opposition of the people in their day as a fulfillment of this prophecy, but anytime people so oppose God’s work it is a fulfillment of this and similar prophecies.

So we should likewise not be surprised when people oppose our work for Christ and when rulers and people in high places try to hinder our efforts for His cause. This has often been true and will often continue to be. This very fact of itself should give us comfort when it does happen. God has not lost control. He has said that such trials will come to test the faith of His people. But He has also said that all opposition to His work is vain.

4:27,28 – God had determined beforehand that Jesus would face rejection.

The disciples then explained this prophecy showing that the Anointed One was Jesus, and that he was opposed by the Gentiles (Romans) and by rulers including Herod and Pilate, and by the people of Israel. They plotted against Him to kill Him. The apostles themselves then experienced continued opposition, which explains what happened to Peter and John.

All this, however, is just what God had purposed and ordained beforehand to happen (compare notes on 2:23; 3:18). This does not mean that God forced good men to do evil things so that His Son would be killed. But He did foreknow that there would be evil men willing to kill His Son, and He predetermined to use these men for His purpose.

As these disciples began to experience the heavy hand of persecution, they realized it had been predicted ahead of time to be so. And there have continually been times of persecution against God's people, some times worse than others. But the Bible predicts it, so we should not be surprised or faint when it happens (compare 2 Timothy 3:12; Luke 6:22f; 12:51f). We should realize that it fulfills God's predictions and, just as these people faithfully endured it, we can do the same.

Finally, note that the rejection of Jesus by the people and their opposition to Him were not foreign to God's intent nor were they unexpected in His plans as premillennial folks say. The Old Testament repeatedly shows that God knew ahead of time it would happen and in fact planned that it must be so for us to be saved. In Acts chapters 2, 3, and now 4, specific prophecies have been repeatedly cited showing that this is what God expected and intended. In fact the fulfillment of these prophecies is one of the proofs that Jesus really is the Christ!

Premillennialists further claim that Jesus intended to set up His kingdom when He came the first time, but could not do so because of the opposition of the Jews and Romans. This context shows, not only that God knew Jesus would be rejected and killed, but that the opposition of men was "vain" (verse 25) – they could never defeat God's plan. What happened was exactly in harmony with God's plan, not a defeat of it.

4:29,30 – The disciples prayed for boldness to preach the gospel and continue to do miracles.

Having stated that they know the opposition was predicted by God, they showed their faith by asking Him for the strength to continue to do what is right. They had been persecuted for preaching the gospel. They had been specifically commanded not to preach and had been threatened with punishment if they continued. But instead of quitting or even considering a compromise, they prayed for strength to continue doing the very thing they had been commanded by the rulers not to do!

Note that they did not ask for the persecution to cease, but only that they have the courage ("boldness") to speak God's word despite the threats. This is the same request we should make when we face suffering for the cause of Christ, and He has promised to provide the strength we need (1 Corinthians 10:13; Ephesians 3:13-21; 6:16-18; Philippians 4:13). Note that they also did not ask for terrible calamities on their enemies, but only that they themselves could be faithful despite them.

They also asked Him to continue the healings, wonders, and signs in Jesus' name. That was what had originated Peter and John's arrest, but they did not ask for it to cease and give them rest from their enemies. Rather they asked for it to continue! They knew, as we should know, that these miracles were further demonstration that God was working through them confirming their word (see notes on Acts 3:1-10).

Note that again the disciples used the same proofs over and over again to confirm that the message they were preaching and the work they

were doing was what God wanted: miraculous confirmation and fulfilled prophecy. When our faith is tested by those who would discourage us from working for the Lord, we need to turn to the same proofs and remind ourselves repeatedly of them.

4:31 – As a result of their prayer, the place was shaken and bold preaching continued.

The verse says that they had prayed (see notes on verse 24 to see how this demonstrates the definition of prayer). Note also that prayer does come to an end. They “had prayed,” showing the prayer reached an end. Prayer is not, as some people argue, something that Christians do all the time with no break.

Further, God answered their prayer immediately. He does not always answer immediately, and He does not do miracles today as in this case (see notes on 3:1ff). But He has always promised to answer prayers that are in harmony with His will.

He responded by immediately doing the kind of miracle they had requested. He shook the place where they were assembled, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke God’s word with boldness. This was exactly what they had requested!

This is also exactly what the Sanhedrin had forbade them to do (verses 17-21)! They had told the rulers they would have to keep preaching, and now by the direct power of God, they did so (see notes on 4:19 and 5:29).

Note that “boldness” in preaching is exactly what we have witnessed in Acts 2, 3, and now 4.

Boldness is courage, but regarding preaching it is the courage to tell people what they need to hear, and especially to tell them they are wrong and need to repent, despite the fact they may not like it and despite the fact we have been threatened with harm if we say it. This takes courage. But it is what the disciples prayed for, and we need it too.

Note that this is not the same as meanness, cruelty, hatred, pride, self-righteousness, or a hard-heart. The disciples did not speak to hurt the people they taught, but to help them see their need to repent and do right. They were direct and to the point. Their speech was not so confusing it could not be understood. But they spoke to help the people and to lead them to become pleasing to God.

Let us summarize what we can learn from verses 23-31 about how the disciples handled persecution:

1. They assembled and associated with other Christians so they could strengthen one another (verse 23).
2. They reminded one another of God’s power and great works (verse 24). This strengthened their faith and helped them remember that they should never displease God, the supreme power, for the sake of pleasing men, who are inferior in power.

3. They reminded one another of the proofs on which their faith was based: fulfilled prophecy (verses 25,26) and miracles (verse 30). This strengthened their faith to face the opposition.

4. They took comfort in the fact that the opposition was something God had predicted and therefore something to be expected (verses 25-28). It was not a sign they had done something wrong, nor was it cause to forsake their duty. They knew all along it should so happen.

5. They prayed to God for strength to endure and do right despite the problems.

These are exactly the same methods we should use when opposed.

4:32-37 - Care of the Needy

4:32 – The disciples shared generously with needy members.

These verses (through 5:11) show the disciples caring for the needy among their number (compare 2:44,45; 6:1-6 and notes there; also study Romans 15:25ff; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; Acts 11:28-30; 2 Corinthians 8&9).

This was an activity of the “multitude of them that believed.” That this was a church function is implied by the following facts: (1) the group of disciples acted together. (2) It was done under the guidance of the apostles (verse 35). (3) 5:4 shows that the money was under the control of the individuals until they gave it. By necessary inference it follows that, after they gave it, it belonged to someone else (the group). (4) Comparing other examples (as listed above) shows that what was done here harmonizes with other examples of church action.

The disciples were “of one heart and soul.” This shows unity in goal and work. This attitude of oneness is essential to real progress in God’s service (compare John 17:20-22; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13; Ephesians 4:1-6; Philippians 2:1-5; James 3:14-18; etc.).

In particular, this attitude of oneness led the people to be willing to share with one another. They did not consider their possessions to be their own. If they were one, then what belonged to one, in a sense belonged to all. None considered that his possessions had been given for his own exclusive use regardless of the needs of others. He saw an obligation to help his brother in time of need. All our blessings are from God and ultimately belong to Him. They are ours to use for Him, hence a stewardship.

As a result , they had all things common (κοινος – from the root word for communion and fellowship). The basic idea is that of sharing. The early Christians shared all things with one another because they did not consider their possessions to belong exclusively to them.

This is not teaching Marxist-Leninist communism nor even communal living as practiced by some today (see notes on 2:44,45). Further, even this extreme degree of sacrifice in giving was needed only in extreme emergency, not in general circumstances.

4:33 – The apostles powerfully gave their testimony of the resurrection.

Bearing testimony to Jesus' resurrection was the special job Jesus had given the apostles (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8,22; 2:32; 3:15; etc.). And it was the very thing the rulers had objected to (4:2,15-21). It is the cornerstone of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15). Specifically, Jesus had promised to give them the power of the Holy Spirit to help them in this testimony (Acts 1:8). Here we are assured that they continued to do this work with power. By preaching this message, the apostles strengthened the disciples' faith in time of opposition. No doubt it was this preaching that led to the oneness which in turn led to the generous sharing among the disciples.

There was also great grace upon them all. All had received God's mercy and forgiveness. Appreciation of God's grace motivated them to serve God and one another. When we realize we are all the subjects of God's mercy, it helps us have a united attitude.

4:34,35 – None among them lacked because members gave generously, even selling houses or property.

These verses show the purpose of the giving and sharing: so that no one lacked (verse 34), i.e., to care for people who had need (verse 35). Apparently, special emergency circumstances existed that resulted in a number of destitute Christians at Jerusalem. This was most likely because the people who had come to Pentecost and been converted (Acts 2) had stayed to learn more truth before returning home. Naturally they needed to be cared for.

There were also special material needs the church cared for later in its history. All were temporary emergency circumstances (see Acts 11:28-30; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; Romans 15:25ff; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9). When the emergency arose, Christians were generous to provide for their needy brethren. When the need was resolved for any needy individual, the church no longer was responsible to care for that person. The purpose was to relieve the need and eliminate the lack. Each person received only to the extent of his need and only as long as he remained in need. But each was expected to meet his own need as soon as reasonably possible (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

Note again that the people who received the care from the church were believers, so that none "among them" lacked (compare verses 32,34). When we understand that those who gave were believers (verse 32), then we must likewise understand that those who received were believers. The church cared for its own needy members, but there is no evidence they began a general welfare program to care for needy people throughout the community. This is the pattern that is invariably observed when the church cared for the needy (see notes on 2:44f; 3:1ff). Members as individuals are responsible to care for needy people to the extent of their ability whether or not those people are Christians; but the

church as a group cared for needy members while emphasizing its primary work of spreading the gospel and worshipping God.

The extent of people's generosity is indicated by the fact they were willing even to sell possessions to give the money. We should have a similar willingness if we faced similar situations. Would we?

Note, however, that contrary to some misconceptions, even in these circumstances, not all members were compelled to sell all they had or to give all their money – see 5:4 and notes on 2:44,45. This was not forced communism or communal living. It was an emergency time of need which was met by those who had possessions caring for those who lacked.

(The language may seem to imply that everyone who had any property sold it all. But not all members sold all their possessions. The expression could mean they sold property they had beyond what they personally needed for their own family obligations – 1 Timothy 5:8. If they sold and gave so much that they themselves came to be in need and the church had to help them, the whole purpose of the giving would be defeated.)

The gifts of the members were placed at the apostles' feet to distribute to the needy. This expression necessarily implies the formation of a treasury or pool of funds that these men had authority over to use to care for the needy. The funds passed from the control of the individuals (5:4) to that of the group as led by the apostles. See the expression used elsewhere in Acts 7:58; Matthew 15:30; 1 Corinthians 15:25,27; Ephesians 1:22; Hebrews 2:8; etc. (see Grimm-Wilke-Thayer).

It appears at this time that the apostles were acting as leaders overseeing the church, since they were divinely inspired, until such time as qualified elders could be appointed (compare 1:20; 6:2,3). Men were later appointed to take this specific work from them (6:1-6), and eventually the church had elders (chapter 15; etc.).

4:36,37 – One who sold his property was Barnabas.

These verses tell of a specific example of one who gave generously. No doubt he is introduced here because he later played a prominent role in the work recorded in Acts. The man was Joses, a Levite from Cyprus. The apostles gave him the name Barnabas, which means "Son of Encouragement."

Here, as often in the Bible, "son" does not refer to physical offspring or that which brings something else into existence. Rather, it simply refers to one who possesses some characteristic or quality of character, as a son's character is often similar to that of his father. Joses was characterized by exhorting or encouraging others. We will later see him often doing that work. This work is valuable today, even as it was then. We should appreciate the need for exhorting and encouraging one another in the church.

This man in particular sold a field and brought the money to the apostles. Note that, in the Bible pattern, members did not donate the

actual lands or houses to the church, so as to cause the church to hold large amounts of physical property. Rather, the individuals sold the property and gave the money to the church so the church could use it in its work.

Other passages referring to Barnabas are: Acts 11:22ff; 13:1-3; chapter 13-15; Galatians 2:13.

In summary we learn the following facts from this example of church benevolence:

(1) The church is authorized to care for some physically needy people. This follows because the distribution was made according to need and to avoid people having a lack (verses 34,35). (2) The people cared for were members of the church (believers – verse 32). This agrees with all the other examples in Acts and elsewhere. (3) The church got its money by taking up collections from the members. (4) The result of the collection was a pool or treasury of funds used by the church to do its work. This money was then under the control of the group, led by its authorized leaders, rather than being under the control of the individual members as it had been before it was given.

For further discussion of the work and organization of the church, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

Acts 5

5:1-16 - The Death of Ananias & Sapphira

5:1-3 – Ananias and Sapphira sold a possession and brought part of the price as a gift. Peter asked why they had lied.

The story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) shows the danger of lying and the danger of seeking praises of men for our good works. Like other disciples had been doing (4:34,37), they sold a property and gave part of the price to the church. This was good and admirable, yet they ended up being condemned.

The sin was not that they gave only part of the price. They were not obligated to sell their property, nor to give the full price of the sale (verse 4). The sin was that they lied about the gift (verses 3,8). They gave just part of the price (verse 2), but agreed to tell people they had received a different price (verses 7-9).

This passage shows the origin of lies.

Peter said Ananias lied because Satan had “filled his heart.” Satan cannot force us to sin. Ananias and Sapphira were still accountable for what they did. That is why they were killed. The point is that Satan tempted them and, instead of resisting him, they let him come into their hearts and control their conduct. Compare 1 Corinthians 10:13; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8,9; John 8:40-44. The same is true of all sin (Matthew 15:1-20; James 1:13-15).

Other verses showing the danger of lying and deceit are: 1 Peter 2:1,22; 3:10; Matthew 15:18-20; Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9; Revelation 21:8,27; 22:14,15; Proverbs 6:16-19; 19:22; Psalm 24:3-5; 40:4; Exodus 20:16; John 8:44.

This also shows the danger of doing religious acts for an outward show to make an impression on people.

This was a major problem of the Jewish leaders (Matthew 6:1-18; 23:1-12). Acts of worship and service to God actually become evil when done for wrong reasons. And such wrong motives also often lead to other forms of outward sin, such as lying in this case.

This event also shows that some people want the blessings and glory of serving God without accepting the sacrifice involved. Just because we serve the true God does not necessarily mean He will be pleased with our service. We must offer the service He has authorized in the way He has authorized. This takes effort and self-denial. Some want the honor of

obedience without the effort. So they put on a pretense. God is not fooled.

Acts 5:3,4 also demonstrates that the Holy Spirit possesses Deity. Verse 3 says Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit, but verse 4 says he lied to God. Therefore, the Holy Spirit must be God – i.e., He possesses Deity as do the Father and the Son.

Note the significance of this record in understanding the concept of free moral agency.

The passage says Satan filled Ananias' heart to tell the lie. But v4 says he conceived this thing in his own heart. This shows, not only that Ananias was responsible for the sin, but that man has power to choose whether or not to cooperate or permit Satan to influence him to sin. Satan brings temptation, but he fills our heart only when we allow him to come in. The end result is that Ananias is said to have conceived this in his heart. Somehow (using means we may not understand)

Satan brings ideas to our minds, but we have power to accept or reject. Just as a woman conceives when a cell from her body joins with a cell from the man's body, so we conceive sin in our minds when our mind cooperates with Satan's efforts to tempt us (James 1:13-15). Thus sin is a joint action between Satan and the human sinner.

The same is true of good that we do. God may urge us to do right (through His word or circumstances of life), but we must choose to cooperate. Calvinism says we are totally depraved from birth and unable to conceive anything but evil. But passages like this show that we are perfectly able to choose to do good or evil. Both Satan and God work to urge us, but we become good or evil only when we choose which course we will take. Doing good involves both God's influence on us and our choice to submit.

This also helps explain passages such as Romans 9 that says God hardened hearts or moved certain men to do wrong, such as Pharaoh, Judas, the Jews who killed Jesus, etc. None of this occurred arbitrarily or by compulsion apart from the choice of the individuals. Each of these individuals had already chosen to do evil. God, knowing their hearts, appealed to them by His word (or circumstances) to do right. But their evil hearts resisted God's message.

The message is designed to either melt the heart of those who are humbly submissive or to harden the hearts of those who are stubbornly resistant. So both God and the individual are said to harden the person's heart, because both influences are at work. This is understood better when we see how both Satan's influence and the person's choice are at work when man sins.

5:4 – Men have the God-given right to choose how they will use possessions that God has placed in their stewardship.

This passage teaches several things about giving to the church.

(1) Members are not required to give all they possess. Even in such emergency circumstances as described in this context, members continued to have the right to own private property. This is not an example of forced communal living.

(2) It is up to the members to decide how much they will give. There are inspired principles we must follow and the church must teach the principles involved, but each individual decides for himself how much he will give (2 Corinthians 9:7). Neither the church nor any church leader has the right to tell others how much to give. Each individual will then give account before God for the amount he chooses to give.

(3) There is a clear distinction between the church and the individual, and specifically there is a distinction between church funds and individual funds, despite the claims of some. The property and the price of the property were under Ananias' control until he gave the money to the church. After he gave it, by implication, it would no longer be under his control but would pass to the control of the church (led by the apostles at whose feet it was laid – 4:35,37; 5:2).

The church has no power to decide how an individual must spend his money, and likewise no one individual has the right to decide how church funds will be spent. These are separate funds under separate control. The Bible does not teach that “there is no distinction between the church and the individual, so whatever the individual can do, the church can do.” (Compare 1 Timothy 5:16.)

(4) This also shows, by necessary inference, that the church has a treasury or pool of funds under its control (see on 4:32-35). The money, once given, was no longer in the giver's control. Who then controlled it? It was under control of the church as led by its God-ordained leaders (the apostles in this case). It became group funds. The funds so given by various members constitutes a treasury or pool of funds controlled by the church to do its work.

5:5,6 – Ananias was slain for his lie.

The record then reveals the punishment brought on Ananias. He was slain, obviously by God, and taken out and buried. This brought great fear on all who heard.

The event required some disciplinary response. These people's conduct made a mockery of all that the church stood for and, more important, of all that God was trying to accomplish. If it was ignored, people would think they could fool God. Since this was the first example of such a challenge to God's will within the early church and under the gospel dispensation, God determined to take matters in His own hands. He could have commanded Peter and the apostles to deal with the matter, but that might leave people in doubt as to whether or not the apostles had done what God wanted. The means God used left no doubt that the result was His will.

For further comment on discipline in the church see notes on verses 10,11.

5:7-9 – Peter confronted Sapphira. When she repeated the lie, Peter said that she too must die.

This shows more fully the nature of the sin involved. Sapphira came later not knowing what had happened to her husband. Peter asked her whether they had sold the land for a certain price, and she said that was the price. Note that Peter gave her the chance to make the matter right if she would. Instead she demonstrated that she was determined to join in the sin with her husband. This also confirms that the sin was that they lied about the amount they had gotten for the land.

Peter said that, in doing this, they had agreed to tempt the Spirit of the Lord. This seems to mean that they did not believe or realize that the Holy Spirit could know their hearts and the real price. They thought they could hide their intent from God and “pull the wool over his eyes.” It was a challenge to the knowledge of God. Could He know the sin or could He be mocked (Galatians 6:7,8)? The Holy Spirit decided the matter by revealing to the inspired apostle the sin that had been committed.

We might wonder why Sapphira came in three hours later not knowing what had happened to her husband.

If this was a church collection (and it surely was – see 4:32ff), then according to 1 Corinthians 16:1,2, it should have been done on the first day of the week. This would be the same time the church assembled for the Lord’s Supper (Acts 20:7), so Sapphira should have been present in the assembly when this all took place. And if this was an assembly of the church, why was Sapphira allowed to answer questions in apparent violation of 1 Corinthians 14:34,35? Some conclude that the teaching on these matters had not yet been revealed, but there are other more likely explanations.

It is possible that Sapphira missed the assembly and came after it had dismissed when her husband did not come home as expected. This does not justify people missing assemblies today. Remember that Sapphira was, after all, not a model Christian.

An even more likely explanation is that all the events, verse 3 and following, occurred after the assembly of the church had dismissed. The apostles often taught in the temple to unconverted Jews (compare 5:12-20,25). No doubt many other disciples were present for this, but it was not a church assembly so not all would be expected to come.

Perhaps in this case the gift was given in the assembly, then the assembly dismissed. Sapphira went home, but Ananias stayed to observe as other teaching was done primarily for unbelievers. It may have been at this time that Peter confronted him and the disciplinary action occurred. When he had not returned home after three hours, Sapphira came to find out what had happened to him and her confrontation with

Peter ensued as recorded. This would fit the whole case and all other passages too. Perhaps there are other explanations that may fit, but here is at least one Scriptural possibility.

5:10,11 – Sapphira also was slain, and great fear came upon the church and all that heard.

Sapphira, like her husband, was killed by God, and young men buried her. God does not always kill sinners in the church (compare Acts 8) nor does He always bring discipline miraculously. As in the case of all Bible miracles, there was teaching that accompanied the miracle. The miraculous demonstration of God's power confirmed the message of Peter, showing that the disciplinary action was from God and had His approval.

This is the first recorded example of discipline or chastisement of members of the early church.

It occurred by miraculous means, directly from God through an inspired apostle. It involved the death of the sinners. In these ways it differs from the principles of church discipline later ordained for the church to continue to practice. However, we can learn important lessons by comparing to other passages on church discipline: 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14,15; Matthew 18:15-17; Titus 3:10,11; Romans 16:17,18; 1 Timothy 1:3-11,19,20; 2 Corinthians 2:6-11; 2 John 9-11; Hebrews 12:15; 1 Corinthians 15:33.

Here are important lessons regarding discipline in a local church:

(1) God believes in discipline in the church. He Himself began the practice. If, as some claim, discipline is harmful to the church and is even contrary to the character of God, why did God Himself practice it? And why does the passage immediately state that the church increasingly grew following this event (verses 13,14)?

(2) It should be practiced only in cases in which members are clearly guilty of sin.

(3) When properly practiced, rather than causing hatred and rebellion as some claim, it causes people, both inside the church and outside, to respect the church for its stand for the truth (verses 11,13).

The pattern for later church discipline, as revealed in the above Scriptures, does not require the participation of apostles, nor does it involve killing anyone. But it still harmonizes with these principles.

And finally note that this example thoroughly refutes the concept of "once saved, always saved."

5:12-14 – Miracles continued and the church grew.

The disciples still continued to meet united in Solomon's porch of the temple, where the apostles continued doing miracles. Note how often the text reminds us that these people were united ("of one accord"). Such unity is essential to a growing, effective congregation.

There was a group of people, referred to here as “the rest,” who would not join themselves to the disciples. This could refer to some of the rulers or opponents, but they seem to be distinguished from “the people” and they are surely distinguished from the “believers” of verse 14. In any case, the people in general had high esteem for the Christians (compare 2:47), and multitudes of men and women were being added to the Lord in increasing numbers. From this point on we are not told the size of the group. The last we heard it consisted of 5000 men (perhaps not counting women) – 4:4. In any case, it became increasingly larger as “multitudes” of men and women were converted.

Note that the favor shown by the crowds of people worked to the disciples’ benefit in that it limited the willingness of the leaders to harm the disciples under the circumstances (compare v26).

Whereas becoming a Christian was called, in 2:41,47, being add “to them” or “to the church,” here is it called being added “to the Lord” (compare Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3). This is the same, since people who are converted become part of the church, which is the body over which Christ serves as Head.

5:15,16 – People with illnesses and demons came from around Jerusalem so even Peter’s shadow might pass over them.

Verse 12 told us that miracles were being done by the apostles’ hands (compare 2:43; 3:1ff; 4:16,30). Note that it was only the apostles who were, even yet, said to be doing the miracles. Why so, if 120 people received the Holy Spirit baptism in 2:1ff?

So determined were the people to receive miraculous healings that they tried to find a place where even Peter’s shadow might touch them. (Whether or not the shadow’s touch actually resulted in healing is not stated, though it may be implied. In any case it shows that the people recognized the power that was present. And verse 16 shows that, whether by the touch of the shadow or not, everyone was healed.

People were coming now, not just from Jerusalem, but from surrounding cities to be healed. The result is that the message of Jesus was being spread beyond the confines of Jerusalem.

Note again that the apostles’ attempts to heal people were always successful, no matter what the disease or unclean spirit was. No sickness was too hard. No attempts failed. This characterized true Bible examples of miraculous healings by the Holy Spirit in Jesus’ ministry and in the apostles’ work after the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

“Faith healers” today, however, claim to have the same power as the apostles, but they cannot heal all who come to them. As discussed in chapter 3, they sometimes claim they cannot heal certain people because the people do not have enough faith. But the apostles needed no such excuses. They just healed everybody who came. These were true miracles. Modern attempts to duplicate this are fraudulent.

5:17-42 - The Second Arrest

5:17,18 – The high priest and Sadducees again arrested the apostles.

The rulers had told Peter and John to quit preaching about Jesus (4:17-22). They had responded that they must continue to preach, and had prayed for boldness to continue to preach and do miracles (4:23-31). They had indeed continued, and the result had been many conversions (5:12-16). This was the very result the rulers had sought to avoid.

The apostles, in short, were again creating a problem for the Jewish rulers. So the high priest and others with him, of the Sadducees' sect, again arrested and imprisoned the apostles. They were filled with indignation (jealousy – ASV). The apostles had defied a direct order from the council. More important, the Sadducees denied the resurrection, which the apostles were preaching. The gospel message made the rulers look bad, especially because they had killed Jesus. And as with Jesus' preaching, they were envious of the apostles because they were losing followers to them (Matthew 27:18).

5:19,20 – An angel released the apostles and commanded them to preach in the temple.

God defied the power of the rulers. He sent an angel at night to open the prison doors and release the apostles (compare Acts 12). He then commanded them to go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life. Jesus had the words of eternal life (John 6:63,68), and this is the message we, like the apostles, should preach.

In spite of opposition and persecution, they were commanded to keep preaching – the very thing they knew the rulers opposed. They had the faith and courage to do as God said. Do we have this same courage when we are opposed (2 Timothy 3:12)?

Verses 21 & 25 show that the apostles did as commanded and entered the temple at daybreak and taught the people. Note that they did not delay but obeyed immediately.

We have here an apparent example of a “Bible class” arrangement of teaching: a plurality of teachers were in the same place at the same time and all were standing and speaking to the people (compare verses 20,25). Since twelve teachers were involved, this would almost surely involve having the people divided into separate groups or else they would have created confusion and disorder. And this was done at the command and by the arrangement of God through an angel.

5:21-25 – The council was amazed to learn that the apostles were not in prison but were teaching in the temple.

In the morning the council and elders (“senate” – ASV) of the Jews (the Sanhedrin council) assembled to consider the case of the apostles.

But when they sent to bring the apostles from the prison, they found nobody there!

Note that the disappearance was done in a way totally uncharacteristic of a typical “prison break.” The doors were shut and the guards were standing in place. This implies superhuman power involved. Had the men left by their own power, they would have fled hurriedly, not taking time to close the doors. And the guards would most likely be knocked out, tied up, or pursuing the escaped prisoners. And the escapees would surely not be standing in a public place once again doing the very thing for which they had been imprisoned! But in this case everything was perfectly normal except one: the prisoners were gone.

This would be truly amazing, and so it was to these rulers. It seems they should have realized that these miraculous events proved the apostles were not evildoers. They had admitted that the healing of the lame man was miraculous and now the apostles had disappeared without a trace from a locked prison. But these rulers had hardened themselves against all Jesus’ miracles, so they would be unlikely to change because of the evidence here presented them. Instead of being concerned that they may have been wrong in their judgment of the men, their only concern seems to be about what will come of all this – meaning what would happen if the people found out.

Then the news came that the apostles were standing in the temple preaching! This was the very worst outcome, for it was the very thing they had sought throughout to avoid!

5:26-28 – The apostles were arrested and accused of disobeying the council and accusing the rulers of murder.

The soldiers were sent once again to arrest the apostles. But they had to do it carefully without violence because they were afraid the people might stone them. The people favored the apostles, especially because of the great miracles done (verses 12-16). The rulers always sought to avoid alienating the people.

When the apostles came before the council, the high priest accused the apostles of disobeying the council’s command not to preach in Jesus’ name (4:17ff). Instead of doing as commanded, the apostles had filled Jerusalem with their teaching, thereby making the rulers to appear guilty of killing this innocent man Jesus. Note that now they did not want to be blamed for Jesus’ blood, but when Jesus had been on trial before Pilate, they had willingly accepted Jesus’ blood on themselves (Matthew 27:25). But now it made them look bad, and they did not want their guilt made known.

Note also the zeal of the apostles. They had filled Jerusalem with the teaching. In a short time they had spread the message till almost everyone knew about it. We need to do the same in our area. Do we have the same zeal they had?

Let us summarize why the rulers were upset:

1. They were jealous of the apostles' following.
2. They did not believe in the resurrection which the apostles were teaching.
3. The apostles were charging them with having killed an innocent man, even their Christ, the very Son of God.
4. The apostles had disobeyed the rulers' express orders.

5:29 – The apostles affirmed they have a greater duty to obey God than to submit to any human authorities.

See notes on Acts 4:17-20. The Bible clearly teaches Christians to obey civil rulers (Romans 13:1-5; 1 Peter 2:13-17; Matthew 22:15-22). Jesus and His apostles were neither revolutionaries nor rebels. In this case, the council did have authority over the apostles. They did not dispute that.

However, their first allegiance, like ours, is to God who has the highest authority. This is a matter of authority, and since God has the highest authority, we must obey Him no matter who tells us to do otherwise. The council, as religious leaders, should have understood this and probably would have understood it had they been the ones who were commanded to do what they believed violated God's law.

In this case, the council had said not to teach and preach the message of Jesus, whereas God had expressly told the apostles to preach it everywhere (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16). An angel had just told them to preach it specifically at that time in the temple (verses 19,20). This left them no choice but to disobey God's command or disobey the rulers' command. To please God, they had to disobey the rulers.

The same principle applies regarding any human authority: parents over children, husbands over wives, elders in the church, employers over employees, etc. No matter what human authority God had instructed us to obey, we must disobey them when necessary in order to keep God's laws.

Note that this should not be viewed as an excuse for disobeying rulers just to do what we want to do. Nor does it justify us in disobeying men simply because they have committed sin. Civil rulers in the first century were exceedingly corrupt, but Jesus and apostles still said to obey them unless the rulers told God's people to do what would violate God's law. The issue is what they require **us** (God's people) to do. "We must obey God..." We disobey rulers only when they tell **us** to disobey God. Then we not only may disobey rulers, but we "**must**" disobey them. Otherwise, no matter how evil and corrupt they are, we must obey them.

5:30-32 – Peter then repeated that Jesus was sent from God, but the rulers had murdered Him and God raised Him.

Peter proceeded to boldly affirm the resurrection of Jesus: the very thing that most upset the Sadducees among these rulers. He furthermore affirmed the guilt of the rulers in that they murdered Jesus by crucifying Him. Yet despite their opposition, God had exalted Jesus to His right hand as a ruler (prince) and the Savior who can provide repentance and forgiveness to Israel. Finally, he claimed that the apostles and the Holy Spirit were witnesses to these things.

The courage of this teaching is amazing. Every point to which these rulers most objected, Peter deliberately affirmed to be true. Surely Peter's example disproves the claim some make that we today should keep quiet about the sins of others because we may offend them, or that religious leaders in particular should not be subject to rebuke. Such direct rebuke, as occurred here, may not be appropriate as the beginning point in teaching with those who have not heard the message before. But these rulers had received similar messages and similar evidence repeatedly and had hardened themselves against it; so Peter immediately went to the point.

In Acts 2, 3, 4, and now chapter 5, Peter has made these same identical points. They have been taught in four chapters now in a row, and always the same proofs are used: resurrection, miracles, and fulfilled prophecy.

How did the Holy Spirit witness to these things? He testified by the message He revealed to the apostles (the gospel), by the confirmation of miracles from the Spirit that the message is true, and by prophecies given by the Spirit in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New Testament. This is exactly the work of the Spirit as described in Acts 2-4 (note 1:8).

Note that the Spirit is a person ("whom"), and He is given to those who obey. How is He given? It is not just gifts that He gives, but He is given. This is true, however, in the sense of fellowship or communion with Him because of our obedience. This is the sense in which we "receive" Him within us. Compare John 17:20,21; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; etc. See notes on Acts 2:38. (The context might refer to miraculous gifts, though not all received these; but the Spirit is given to all who obey in the indwelling of the Spirit).

5:33 – The rulers reacted by seeking to kill the apostles.

The plain preaching of Peter had a significant effect on the hearers. They were furious and planned to kill the apostles, as they had done to their Master. This is not surprising. People who will not accept the truth, soon begin to oppose it. The more plainly it condemns them, the more they are determined to eliminate its influence. The gospel rebukes their sin and they don't want to change, so instead they seek to remove the source of rebuke.

Note how this differs from the reaction of the people in 2:37. In both cases the people were told essentially the same message: they were sinners guilty of having killed the Son of God. In both cases they were cut to the heart by the message. But in Acts 2, the people decided to repent and change, so 3000 were baptized. Here the hearers sought to kill the preacher! See Acts 7:54ff where the same council finally did kill Stephen.

We stand amazed at the callousness of such men. They had repeatedly seen proof that Jesus was from God. Here they saw clear proof that the apostles were from God. This proof came in the form of miracles (including the miraculous release from prison that preceded this very hearing), fulfilled prophecy, and eyewitness testimony of the resurrection. They were religious leaders who claimed to know and obey God's law. They were sticklers for minute obedience as in tithing and laws of purification. But here they were willing to murder men for whom there was no evidence whatever of wrongdoing.

5:34-37 – Gamaliel reminded the council of rebels who failed.

One member of the council was a Pharisee named Gamaliel, respected by all and learned in the law (Acts 22:3 tells us he was the teacher of Saul of Tarsus). As a Pharisee, he would have been more favorably disposed to the apostles than were the Sadducees, since the Pharisees believed in the resurrection but the Sadducees did not.

He asked to have the apostles placed outside, obviously to obtain some confidentiality for his comments to the other council members. He named two instances of people who attempted to get a following. Both of them ended up perishing and their efforts came to nothing. Some commentators point out that we have some confirming evidence about these men in Josephus or other historians. But this is not necessary to the point.

Some may wonder how Luke knew what was stated in the council meeting if the apostles were no longer present. Of course, the ultimate answer is inspiration. But remember that Luke's approach was that of a historian who recorded what he learned from eyewitnesses (see introduction). This gives us valid evidence of accuracy, even if we are not yet convinced the gospel is inspired. That, in turn, gives us confirming evidence that leads to conviction that the Bible is inspired.

It is likely that Luke could have obtained information from actual council members. Perhaps Joseph of Arimathea or Nicodemus was still on the council. Better yet, Saul of Tarsus may have been on the council. If not, he was a student of the same Gamaliel who made this speech and so may have learned of it directly from Gamaliel himself. After his conversion to Christ, Saul could have told Luke and others of what happened in the meeting. Many priests were also later converted (6:7). Some of them may have been on the council or personally knew those who were on the council.

5:38,39 – Gamaliel advised the council to let the apostles alone.

Based on the two examples of rebels who failed, Gamaliel generalized that all error that is not from God will come to nothing. Therefore, he advised the council to let the apostles alone. If their work was from men, it would come to nothing; but if it was from God, they could not destroy it anyway and would be fighting against God if they opposed it.

Note that Gamaliel correctly observed the two possible sources of all religious movements: from God or from men. This was the real issue to be considered regarding the apostles' teaching, and it is the real issue today regarding the origin of religious views and organizations.

But it seems that his idea was to take a middle-ground, "hands off," compromising approach. If they killed the apostles, they would look bad before the people (an outcome they thoroughly sought to avoid). But if they let them alone, the movement would die of itself without opposition from the council.

This advice worked to the apostles' benefit, since they had committed no crime anyway and deserved no punishment. And it is true that, as regards physical violence and killing of people in error, we ought to take the course Gamaliel recommended. We should "let people alone" rather than seeking physical harm on them, such as the council intended to do to the apostles (verse 33).

Some people want to apply this approach in the area of teaching against religious error.

They seek to call a truce in the war. The idea is that error will die out of itself, so "let it alone." Many advocate this regarding error in the church; others advocate it regarding errors in denominations, etc.

But other passages show us that, while we should love sinners not kill them, we should surely teach against their error vigorously. We must surely not "let them alone" in our teaching. Even Peter was not "letting alone" the error of these rulers. He had rebuked them in four straight chapters of the record. See also Revelation 3:19; Galatians 6:1,2; James 5:19,20; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Ephesians 5:11; 2 Timothy 4:2-4.

It simply is not true that error, left to itself, will die out. True, it will finally be defeated when Jesus comes again. But in the meantime false systems like Catholicism, Islam, Hinduism, Protestant denominations, etc., have lasted for generations and caused many souls to be lost. Even in the church, divisions have occurred over false teachings like instrumental music and church support of human institutions. These did not just die out but plagued the church for years.

On the other hand, Gamaliel's advice was also bad in that, if the doctrine was from God, the rulers should not have just "let them alone," but should have actively accepted the teaching and become Christians. These were the religious leaders who should have been standing for the

truth and leading the people in it. To save their souls they should have accepted the truth. To just avoid “fighting it” is not enough.

In short, Gamaliel advocated a middle-ground compromise. When truth vs. error is the issue, the middle ground belongs to the Devil. We must stand for the truth and oppose the error as Peter did in this case.

5:40-42 – The apostles were beaten but rejoiced that they could suffer for Christ and continued teaching.

The council accepted Gamaliel’s advice and let the apostles go. However, they did beat the apostles and command them not to speak in Jesus’ name. This was sterner treatment than they gave in 4:18-21 when they had let the apostles go with a warning. The opposition did not yet lead to death, but it was becoming more determined. As a result, this “hands off” approach did not last long. The rulers soon changed their minds and began a more forceful persecution (see Acts 7).

The twelve, however, did not moan and groan as we might. Persecution was beginning, but Jesus had warned them of it (John 15:20; etc.). They did not pout but actually rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for Jesus (compare 1 Peter 4:14,16).

What a joyful attitude to be able to rejoice even when persecuted (compare Matthew 5:10-12). There are, of course, some problems in persecution and we are not obligated to overlook those problems. However, when we realize God’s purpose for our lives, there is reason to rejoice in persecution. It leads to a great reward, it strengthens our faith, and it is a way of showing our devotion to God.

The apostles, despite the command of the rulers, did not cease to teach and preach in Jesus’ name. Instead they continued every day preaching and teaching both publicly and privately (in the temple and in every house). Likewise, when people are offended because we teach truth, we must not cease but continue to spread the message. This takes real courage.

And note that our preaching must be both in public assemblies and in private homes. Too many think the public proclamation of the truth is all that is needed. But we need both public and private teaching as the apostles show us. The two work together to create the kind of results we see in the early church. Too many modern congregations are content to assemble and urge people to come. In addition to public meetings, we need to be talking to people personally about the gospel to give them reason to come.

Acts 6

The Choosing of Seven Men to Care for Widows – 6:1-7

A problem arose in the early church, just as problems often do in churches today. The Lord's church always has had and always will have problems, because it consists of human beings. We should not become discouraged just because we have problems.

Unlike some modern churches, however, the Jerusalem church did not ignore its problem. Problems do not go away of themselves. They must be confronted. Far too many churches today are afraid or otherwise unwilling to deal with problems. The result is that problems compound, instead of being resolved. The work of the church suffers, the church does not grow, and souls are not saved as should be done.

This problem dealt with how the funds of the church were being distributed. Note that the first problem in the church was over collecting funds (5:1-11). The second problem was over distribution of funds. Money was a center of conflict in the early church, and it is often a center of conflict today. We should not be surprised this is the case when we consider these examples.

6:1 – Grecian disciples murmured because their widows were being neglected.

The problem that arose involved certain widows who were being neglected in the “daily ministrations.” This indicates that the church was providing for the needs of certain destitute members on a daily basis. The complaint was by the Hellenist or Grecian Jews against the Hebrews. Hellenists were Jews who had been dispersed to areas outside Palestine where Greek was the prominent language. They were Jews in nationality, and had been Jews religiously. But they did not live in Palestine, so they spoke the Greek language. The presence of such people in Jerusalem in apparently large numbers may confirm that many Jews, who had been converted on Pentecost, remained in Jerusalem afterward.

The problem arose “when the number of disciples was multiplying.” While small in number, they apparently had no such problem. There had

presumably not been so many needy people to cause such complications. As the number multiplied to over 5000 men (4:4) and even more were added to that (5:14), complications arose in administering the distribution fairly and adequately to so many people. Growth often results in problems: growing pains. God's people must learn to deal with such problems.

This implies that all were cared for from one common fund, under the oversight of the apostles (4:32-35). This was one congregation with one "treasury" through which it did its work. To deny the existence of a church treasury, as some attempt to do, is foolish in the light of such passages as this. The fact distribution was made daily would necessarily imply the existence of a continuing fund of money – a treasury – from which the money was being distributed.

This passage discusses a problem in the distribution of funds. It does not tell how the funds were obtained; but that information has already been provided, and further information is given elsewhere (Acts 2:44,45; 4:32-5:11; 1 Corinthians 16:1,2; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9). So some passages teach us about how to obtain funds, and others teach us about how to use those funds.

Note again that the passage clearly implies that the people being cared for were members of the "number of the disciples." Why else would the problem arise only when this number "multiplied"? If these widows were non-members, then caring for them should have been getting easier as the number of disciples multiplied! It would have been more difficult for a small number of disciples to have cared for a general welfare program in the community. However, as the number of disciples multiplied, they would have had more means to do that job. But if the people being cared for were disciples, it is understandable that increasing the number would increase the difficulty of administering the distribution. This harmonizes with 2:44,45; 4:32-5:11 and other passages, all of which show that church benevolent work always involved distribution to members (see notes on those passages).

6:2-4 – The apostles told the disciples to select seven qualified men to be over this work, so the apostles could continue in prayer and teaching.

The apostles had a special God-given obligation in teaching and prayer, which obligation they must not neglect. They were, therefore, not the best ones to administer "this business" of "serving tables." Their solution was to call the "multitude of disciples" and tell them to find seven men to be in charge of the distribution. Note that the fact this group came together shows that, despite its large size, the whole congregation was able to meet.

The fact that the apostles instructed the members in this matter would indicate that they were serving, at the time, as shepherds or lead-

ers of the local church. There was no indication that the church had elders until later. But in the infancy of the church, the apostles served a leadership role. However, the job of administering the daily distribution had become too much for them, so they determined to give that job to others under their supervision. This concept of delegation is useful and important for effective leaders to employ.

The qualifications of the men to be chosen were as follows:

“of good reputation” – they had to be men of established reputation. Unlike some people today, the apostles did not believe in appointing men who were unfaithful or borderline faithful, in hopes that the responsibility might encourage them to become faithful workers. They had to have already the reputation of a good and upright past life.

“full of the Spirit” – all people receive the Spirit when we become Christians (2:38; 5:32; 1 Corinthians 6:19; etc.). But some do not remain “full” of the Spirit (compare Ephesians 5:18). Often we lose our zeal for God and do not fill ourselves with His word. (Does this expression necessarily refer to miraculous powers? Note 2:4; 4:8,31; 9:17; 13:9,52; 7:55. See Ephesians 5:18,19. Compare Galatians 5:22-24.)

“(full of) wisdom” – to do the work would require good judgment, ability to make wise decisions.

As with the qualifications of elders and deacons (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1), when the inspired men stated the requirements, the members were able to examine the men among their number and determine who possessed those requirements.

The local church organization was sufficient to care for its needy.

Note that the issue here was what needy individuals the church should help from its treasury, and what help should be given to each individual. The church needed to make sure that all who deserved help received it, while those who did not deserve help would not be given it, and that each needy member received enough to meet their needs so none would be neglected (as had been in the past). This need continues to exist at times in local churches today.

The need was met by men from within the local church (“seek out from among you”) being “appointed over this business” (verse 3). The responsibility to supervise the work and make the necessary decisions was not turned over to a man-made institution with a board of directors to decide the matter. Nor was it turned over even to another church. Each local church made provision, within its own number, to determine who was worthy of help and how much each individual should receive so that none would be neglected. The church was sufficient of itself, within its own organization, to supervise its own work.

This harmonizes with other passages which show that each church should supervise its own work under the leadership of its own officers.

The supervision of elders is limited to the local church where they have been appointed (Acts 14:23; 1 Peter 5:1-3; Acts 20:28). No one outside the local church is authorized to supervise church funds to make these decisions, as is erroneously done when a board of directors of a separate organization asks donations from local churches so it can oversee such decisions. Likewise, the elders of one church may not make such decisions regarding members of another church, for then their supervision would not be limited to the local flock among them. So, the local church must arrange for the decisions to be made within the framework of the local church's organization, just as described here.

Also we notice that the primary responsibilities of the foremost leaders, the men of greatest responsibility and leadership, was to emphasize preaching the word and prayer (verses 2,4) – i.e., spiritual responsibilities. They delegated caring for physical needs to men of lesser authority. To do otherwise would be to “forsake the word.” This harmonizes with the spiritual nature and emphasis of the church as taught elsewhere in Scripture. It is a spiritual body, serving a spiritual Master, bought by a spiritual purchase price, serving under leaders whose work is primarily spiritual. All this shows that the work of the church pertains primarily to the saving of souls by preaching the gospel, worshiping God, and helping men serve God. While it did help needy saints, in certain limited circumstances, yet this was never emphasized like spiritual matters. (1 Peter 2:5; John 18:36; Luke 19:10; 5:32; Matthew 20:28; 26:28; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:23-25; Acts 2:47; John 3:3,5 1 Corinthians 12:13; compare Romans 14:17; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Luke 17:20,21.)

This in turn helps show why the people cared for by the church were always Christians – those among “the number of the disciples” (verse 1). This pattern too is shown in every case where needy people were cared for by the church (see notes on 4:32ff). Individual Christians cared for all who they had opportunity to. But the church cared only for needy members, restricting its involvement in these physical matters and thereby staying free to help people's spiritual needs.

For further discussion of church organization and work, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

6:5,6 – The multitude chose seven men for the apostles to appoint.

The disciples were pleased by the apostles' decision. We are then told the men who were chosen. Of the seven, we know nothing else except in the cases of Stephen and Philip. Stephen is described as one full of faith and the Holy Spirit; his work is further described immediately in this chapter and chapter 7, where he became the first one named as a martyr for the faith. Philip's work is described in chapter 8 as he preached in Samaria and to the Ethiopian treasurer. See also 21:8.

Note again that the apostles did not directly choose the men, but they gave guidelines for the people to follow in choosing them. The men were then set before the apostles who laid hands on them and prayed. This was doubtless their way of “appointing them over this business” (verse 3). Laying on of hands was a customary act of dedicating one to special service (13:3).

Later we will see, however, that when the apostles laid on hands, this generally involved the conferring of miraculous gifts (see notes on 8:14ff). Interestingly, no one besides the apostles is said to have performed any miracles up to this point in Acts. Immediately after this laying on of hands, however, the next 2 1/2 chapters tell about the work of two of these seven men, and both of them had the power to do miracles (6:8; 8:5-24). And we are, in the process, told that the apostles lay hands on the converts of one of these men to give them the Holy Spirit (8:5-24). Of the seven men appointed, we have further information about only two of them, but both of these two had miraculous powers.

Were the men here appointed “deacons” in the same sense as described in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3?

Consider:

(1) The Greek word for “deacon” is *διακονος*, a servant (one who serves). This word in 1 Timothy 3 refers to the office of deacons, but it is also used in many other passages for servants of various types.

(2) *διακονια* is a noun referring to the *work* of service done by a deacon or servant. This is the word for “ministration” in Acts 6:1, but it is also used in many other places for acts of service in general, including verse 4 (“ministry” of the word).

(3) *διακονεω* is the verb for serving and is used in 6:2 (“serve tables”), but it is also used in many other places for other kinds of serving in general. So to summarize, we have:

Verb for the Act	Noun: the Work	Person
διακονεω	διακονια	διακονος
serve	service	servant/deacon

The word “deacon” (as in 1 Timothy 3, etc.) is transliterated from the Greek to give us the sound of the word instead of the meaning. The first two forms of this root word are used in Acts 6 to describe the work of the men appointed here, but these are here translated into English.

So are these references to the office of deacon or to a general work of service with no specific office? The fact these men were formally appointed to a specific work (verses 3,6) seems to imply an office of deacon. Further, the work done by them would surely fit the kind of work that could be done by those who serve in an official capacity in a church.

On the other hand it seems strange that exactly seven were appointed. Why not appoint as many as were qualified? In a congregation of over 5000 men, were only seven found who met the qualifications? If

so, how did the apostles know ahead of time there would be only seven? If they used their miraculous powers to so determine, why not use those powers to just select the men directly instead of telling the church to do so?

Another objection might be the fact that, to this point, there has been no indication of elders having been appointed in Jerusalem. However, the apostles were present and seemed at this time to be supervising the church as elders would. They surely would have kept these “deacons” (if such they were) from taking over the leadership of the church, which is the primary danger when deacons are appointed today where no elders serve.

Note how the church made decisions.

Some point out that the body of disciples chose the men who served and the whole group was “pleased” by the decision to appoint such men. So some use this case to argue that the local church as a group must participate jointly in the making of all group decisions. Some claim that even elders cannot insist their decisions be followed until those decisions have been approved or ratified by the group. Some claim that women must be included in the making of the group decisions and must be allowed to speak out just as men do. (See also notes on Acts 15.)

Verses 2,3

Verse 2 does describe a meeting of the whole church about a matter of church “business” (verse 3). However, **before** the congregation was called together, the apostles had **already** made the basic decisions about what would be done! The meeting with the congregation was to **inform** the church of the decisions that had been made and to **instruct** them to carry out those decisions. There is no indication anywhere that the disciples as a whole – let alone the women – participated in the decision as to how the matter would be handled.

The decision about **what** should be done was made by the **apostles**, the God-ordained leaders! The congregation did not meet to “brainstorm” for a solution. The account nowhere indicates that the apostles even asked for suggestions from the group about what to do. The leaders had already determined the solution. They met to present their decision to the group. Nowhere did they ask permission from the group to carry out their decision, but they simply instructed the group to carry out the decision that had already been made!

Specifically, the apostles had determined exactly **how many** men were needed. This involved decisions even about matters of judgment, made by the leaders of the congregation, apparently in a private meeting among themselves before the congregation met.

Incidentally, if the above had **not** been done, can you **imagine what would happen if the whole congregation met to “brainstorm” the problem?** There was already “murmuring” in the group

about the problem (verse 1). The congregation consisted of 5000 men, apparently not counting women (4:4), plus “multitudes of men and women” who were added later (5:14).

Consider the difficulties of modern church “business meetings” when a dozen or so men meet to discuss and reach conclusions. Then imagine (if you have the courage) such a meeting with over 5000 men and probably that many more women. Everybody gets to have their say. And the leaders (apostles) cannot enforce their decisions on the group, but all decisions must be approved by group consensus. And some brethren want to convince us that **all** decisions must be made this way! May it never be!

Verses 4-6

The instructions given by the apostles were pleasing to the whole congregation. But nothing here proves they had to ratify the decision in order for it to be put in effect. It simply shows they accepted the apostles’ decision and submitted to it.

If this is not so, but if in fact the decision could not take effect till the whole group gave its consensus, then this would give the congregation the power of approval or veto, not just for a decision of men, not just for a decision of elders, but for a decision of **apostles!** Do we believe in submitting to properly ordained leaders or not?

Furthermore, where does the passage say anything about **women** speaking out to the group? Surely they would have been present when the apostles instructed the church what to do, but where does it say they spoke out? The **apostles** spoke to the group. Did the women speak to the group? Where is the proof? I know of no passage anywhere that approves of women speaking out when a local church assembles together in one group, either for worship, for church decision making, or for any congregational activity. Where is it?

Remember that 1 Corinthians 14:35-37 forbids women speaking when the whole church meets. (Nothing here forbids women speaking in small groups like our classes. They are forbidden to speak when the whole church meets together as a group. See 1 Corinthians 14.) And 1 Timothy 2:11,12 specifically forbids women having authority over men.

The apostles told the church to seek out seven qualified men to be in charge of distributing to the needy (verse 3), so they (the group) chose seven men who are named in verse 5. Note even so that it was the leaders, not the people, who appointed these men to the work (verses 3,6).

Consider this act of choosing. This was not a modern election by majority vote. Women and men did not vote on candidates for office. The decision, as with elders and deacons, was based on qualifications. Nor does the passage say the decision was made right there in the public meeting. The instructions were given in the meeting. When, where, and how the final choice was made, we are not told, but whatever was done

must harmonize with the teaching of other passages, including those we have already cited.

Clearly everyone was consulted regarding whether or not men were qualified for an office before those men were set in office. To my knowledge, this has always been the practice of faithful local congregations, whether in appointing elders or deacons. There are many ways this can be done. Sometimes members are asked to submit written statements. Or certain men may be appointed to whom the members may go to express their views. But none of this requires a congregational meeting in which women speak out to the group.

Again, this passage does teach that women should have an opportunity to indicate what they know about whether or not men meet God's qualifications before those men are appointed to serve in office. (If this is not so, then if a man's wife or daughters know things that disqualify him, how can they express this?) But nothing says the women spoke in congregational meetings. And nothing says the women had equal say with men in congregational decisions.

What we really have here is evidence that leaders may make decisions about the work of the church in private meetings. And nothing teaches that the congregation must approve those decisions before they can be put into effect.

Finally, once again note that the leadership roles in this event all belonged to **men**. The apostles made the decisions about what solution would be followed, and the apostles were men. Seven people were appointed to be in charge of the business, and they were all **men**. Church leadership roles – involving leadership over men in the church – always belonged to **men**, never to women.

In summary, the only claims people make (as described above) that are confirmed by this passage is that the local church did have a meeting, and the disciples did choose the men who were appointed to the work. However, the following elements, all of which are essential to the conclusions reached, are missing from the passage or contradict the passage.

- 1) The church as a group did not make the decision regarding how the matter would be resolved. This decision was made by the apostles before the whole group met.

- 2) When the group met, the leaders explained the decision to them, but nothing states or necessarily implies that the group made the decision, had input to the decision, or that their agreement or ratification was necessary.

- 3) Nothing says that the group decided which men would be appointed in a group meeting. Input regarding that decision could have been made in any of various ways without a group meeting. The passage says nothing about how this input was obtained.

4) The group did not formally appoint the men to the work. This was done by the apostles.

5) Finally, and most important, the passage nowhere says that women spoke in any congregational meeting or that they had the power to ratify or reject the apostles' decision about how this would be handled. Everyone who spoke was a man. Every leader who led the group was a man.

Notes on the word “pleased”:

“Pleased” (NKJV) is translated “pleased” (NKJV, ASV, KJV, NIV, RSV, ESV, MLV), “found approval” (NASB), “proved acceptable” (NEB), “was pleasing” (Rhm), “was unanimously agreed to” (TCNT), “met with unanimous approval” (Phi), “met with general approval” (Wey), “commended itself” (Mof). Note that the word “unanimous” is used only in weaker, looser “translations.” And there it comes from the word for “whole,” not the word for “pleased.” “Unanimous” is defined as “being in complete accord, agreed” (*Random House College Dictionary*). Nothing in even these translations implies a vote or even speaking, let alone that the women spoke up in a congregational meeting.

Note that, in all the words and all the usages above, nothing inherently implies that the person who is “pleased” necessarily *says* anything at all. The word has no reference to speech whatever. To be “pleased” refers to an attitude or state of mind, which may not be expressed in words at all.

Specifically, when the church meets, most members are “pleased” by most of the things that occur in the assembly. But this does not prove that they all speak up right then and there and say so! In fact, they may never say so at all, not even after the assembly is dismissed. Are the women “pleased” by what happens in our congregational worship? If so, 1 Corinthians 14 forbids them from speaking up and saying so then and there. Why then should we assume the women spoke in the assembly in Acts 6?

Being “pleased” is a state of mind, having no inherent requirement that the one expresses that pleasure in words, either then or later. If one attempts to use this word to prove that women spoke in the church meeting in Acts 6, he forces on the word a meaning which it simply does not have. In short, he perverts the teaching of the verse.

“Pleased” (Gk. ἀρεσκω) – “1) to please 2) to strive to please 2a) to accommodate one’s self to the opinions desires and interests of others” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

A related form is (ἀρεστος) – “1) pleasing, agreeable” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

6:7 – The gospel was spread effectively and many were added to the number.

Having solved their internal problems, the church was able once again to focus on their work. The apostles, in particular, were once again able to give themselves to the ministry of the word (verses 2,4). As a result the group continued to increase dramatically in number. It is impossible at this point to determine the numbers involved. The number of 5000 men (4:4) grew significantly in 5:14 by “multitudes” and here in 6:7 the number was “multiplied greatly.”

Included among the number of converts were “a great many of the priests.” As the spiritual leaders of the Jews, these men ought to have known the truth and been converted to Jesus. But many of them to this point seem to have opposed the gospel (compare 4:1). One wonders what effect the firm stand of the apostles for the truth had on these priests. In any case, the gospel was progressing. Even many of the spiritual leaders of God’s people, most of whom had opposed Jesus, were now accepting the gospel message.

Note that becoming a disciple required one to be “obedient to the faith.” Compare Mark 16:15,16; Rom 1:15,17; 16:26. See also Galatians 5:6; James 2:14-26; Hebrews 10:39 and chapter 11. The idea of many that people are saved by “faith alone” is simply unscriptural and insufficient for salvation. The Bible teaches that lost men, who truly believe the gospel, must also obey the truths in it to receive salvation. The faith that saves is an obedient faith. “Faith only” without obedience may exist, but it is a dead faith that cannot save (James 2:14-26).

The Death of Stephen – 6:8-7:60

6:8-15 - The Opposition and Arrest

6:8 – Stephen effectively did great miracles.

Having described the appointment of these seven men to serve tables, the account then follows the work of two of these men, Stephen and then Philip. These verses describe the work of Stephen. Obviously he was zealous, not just in the “daily ministrations,” but also in preaching and working miracles.

This is the first record we have in Acts of men other than apostles doing miracles (compare 2:43; 3:1ff; 5:12ff; etc.). It surely seems more than just a coincidence that we were told, just two verses previously, that apostles laid hands on these men.

6:9,10 – Certain Jews disputed with Stephen but could not resist his message.

These verses describe a “disputation” between Stephen and Jews who opposed his teaching. These men were Jews of the synagogue and region named. Note how opposition to the gospel continued. Violence had been checked by Gamaliel’s advice in chapter 5, but the Jews turned to trying to defeat the new message by arguing against it.

“Dispute” means to contend or debate. This was a religious debate. While the Bible may not justify some hateful attitudes sometimes displayed in some public religious debates, it most surely does justify participation in debates provided we maintain a godly attitude. In fact, Jesus’ ministry and the work of the apostles and other preachers such as Stephen are filled with such examples. It is foolish for Christians to oppose that which so obviously harmonizes with God’s plan.

Stephen did not compromise nor turn away from this debate, even though it eventually led to his death. Instead, he so spoke that the opponents of truth were not able to resist the power of his evidence (v10). He continued to contend before the council, powerfully rebuking these Jews to the point they finally killed him (see chapter 7).

Likewise, when men today study God’s word diligently and have the real truth in their hearts, they need not object to fair and honorable arrangements for truth to confront error. Truth will simply shine the brighter when properly handled in conflict. (This is not to say that all arrangements of conflict are wise or fair for Christians to enter into. There are circumstances so unfair or people so prejudiced that confrontation is foolish or a waste of time – see Nehemiah 6; Matthew 7:6. But to oppose debate in general is a mistake.)

6:11 – The Jews accused Stephen of speaking blasphemy against Moses and God.

Opposition to truth often comes in the form of simply ignoring it. However, when people are converted so that large numbers leave the established religious groups, leaders and members of those groups often become upset and try to stop the influence of truth on men’s lives. This was attempted by the council in threatening and then beating the apostles (chapters 4,5).

Here opposition took the form of argument. Jews tried to disprove the teaching by debating against it. When that method fails, people who are determined to stop truth, then often resort to lies, misrepresentations, and even physical harm to those who teach truth to quiet them. This was the case here.

Men were “suborned” (KJV) or “secretly induced” (NKJV) to testify against Stephen. Verse 13 says they were “false witnesses.” The idea is that pressure or some type of secret motivation (perhaps a bribe) was used to get men to testify to what was not true.

The accusation was that he spoke blasphemy against Moses and God (more specifics will be given in later verses). Blasphemy was the same charge made against Jesus, and it was a charge worthy of death under the Old Law (compare Matthew 26:65,66). The nature of the charge shows the intent of the men to get a death sentence. The council had let the apostles go. Now they tried to defeat a man of lesser stature than the apostles, perhaps thinking less of an uproar would be caused among the people if they persecuted him. Also they now had men doing their dirty work for them in making the accusations and serving as false witnesses. In any case, the methods used were exactly the same as had been used to kill Jesus. It worked then, so in their desperation, they tried it again.

However, the charge was no more true this time than it was against Jesus. There was no evidence at all of blasphemy against God. The only possibility here was the charge of destroying the temple (see verse 14). Blasphemy against Moses no doubt referred to claims that people were being taught things different from the Law of Moses (changing the customs revealed by Moses – again see notes on verse 14). See Acts 21:20,21,27-34 where similar accusations were made against Paul. Note that some modern Judaizers make these same accusations against Christians today.

6:12-14 – Stephen was brought before the council and further accused of blasphemy and of saying Jesus would destroy the temple and change the customs of Moses.

The opponents, as when they condemned Jesus, stirred up the people and the leaders, arrested Stephen, and took him to the council. This was the same Sanhedrin that just recently (chapter 4,5) had tried the apostles and commanded them to stop preaching the gospel of Jesus.

The false witnesses accused Stephen of blasphemy against the holy place, claiming Jesus said He would destroy it. This is exactly a charge used against Jesus (Matthew 26:61).

These witnesses were referring to Jesus' statement as recorded in John 2:19, though they did not quote it properly and they surely perverted His intent. He did not say He would destroy the temple, but that they would do it. And His purpose of the statement referred to the temple of His body – that they would kill Him, but He would be raised after three days (John 2:21,22). So, like many people today, the false witnesses perverted Jesus' words and His meaning to try to make Stephen look guilty of wrongdoing.

The charge of changing the customs of the law of Moses was a half truth, but like most half truths it was told to lead to an untrue conclusion. Neither Jesus nor His followers had blasphemed against the law. Jesus did intend to make the Old Law no longer binding and replace it with the gospel. But there was no blasphemy here for it was all done completely

in harmony with what the law itself had predicted and especially in harmony with the will of the giver of the law – God Himself. In that sense, the gospel actually honored God and honored Moses by taking them at their word and teaching that which fulfilled their teaching. See Deuteronomy 18:15-19; Jeremiah 31:31ff; Hebrews 10:1-10; 7:11-14; 8:6-13; 9:1-4; 2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Galatians 3:24,25; 5:1-6; Romans 7:1-7; Ephesians 2:11-16; Colossians 2:13-17.

“Custom” refers to a “custom, usage, prescribed by law...” – Vine.

6:15 – Stephen’s face appeared like that of an angel.

Stephen’s appearance was altered before them so that it appeared like the face of an angel. What that would be is not described; some have thought his face was bright or glowing, since angels sometimes appeared in white or bright appearance. In any case it ought to have warned these men that they were dealing with a man who had supernatural power. He had already done miracles by God’s power. But as when they opposed Jesus and the apostles, the truth mattered not to these men. They sought to promote their power over the people, and truth was the least of their concerns.

Acts 7

7:1-53 - Stephen's Defense

Regarding Stephen's defense, Stringer points out that some points of Stephen's account are hard to reconcile with Old Testament history. Some have used this to claim that Stephen was not inspired in his speech. However, Stephen's message had been confirmed by miracles (6:8), showing he was guided by the Spirit. Several verses state or imply he was inspired by the Spirit (7:55; 6:10).

As Stringer points out, Stephen was on trial before the most learned scholars of the Old Testament that existed in that day. They were determined to find fault with him, even to the point of bringing false witnesses against him. If he made any real blunder in his account of Old Testament history, they would have immediately used it to discredit him. But no such statements ever happened. It follows that they found nothing objectionable in his account. This means that any apparent conflict with Old Testament accounts is not a real conflict but simply the result of a lack of knowledge on our part. Or in some other reasonable way, the accounts can be harmonized, whether or not we ourselves are aware of the exact way to harmonize them.

7:1 – The high priest called on Stephen to answer the charges against him.

This chapter records Stephen's defense before the Sanhedrin council, and his martyrdom that resulted. His defense consisted of one of the best overviews of Jewish history to be found anywhere.

His goal was to show how, throughout their history, the Israelites had wickedly disobeyed God's commands and rejected His prophets. The application was that the Jews who confronted Stephen were guilty of the same error as their ancestors, for they had rejected God's own Son and killed Him. Interestingly, they reacted by committing the very error that Stephen had accused them of: they rejected Stephen's message and killed him!

Note that, from a teaching standpoint, this was an excellent teaching approach. Stephen began with facts the audience loved to hear about. Jews delight in their history because their whole identity as a nation relies on their connection to Abraham and the subsequent history. By beginning there, Stephen immediately had their undivided attention.

Further, he began with facts that they accepted as true and that both he and they accepted as common ground. He reasoned from there to

show them the error which they agreed their ancestors had committed. Then he showed them their own similar error. This is still an effective form of teaching today.

One might think that Stephen was avoiding the issue and evading the charge of blasphemy which had been made against him (6:11-14). However, the accusers had not proved him guilty of blasphemy. As in Jesus' trial, their charges were unfounded and without any substantial evidence. Stephen's previous debates with them proved they could not answer his evidence (6:9,10). No further direct response to those charges was needed.

What he did instead was to go to the heart of the real reason they had opposed his teaching. They were not opposing him because he was a blasphemer. Instead he showed that the real reason for their opposition was that they, like their ancestors before them, had been rebellious and disobedient to God's word. In short, his conclusion is the same presented by Peter in Acts 2,3,4,&5: The people had rejected and killed God's Messiah and they needed to repent and accept Him to be saved.

Note that Jesus, during his trials, made very little defense and sometimes no defense at all. Stephen, however, made a lengthy defense. Paul later did likewise. This shows that silence is not required when people oppose our stand for truth. It simply fit Jesus' purpose at the time and circumstance He faced.

7:2,3 – God called Abraham in Mesopotamia and told him to go to a land God would show him.

Stephen began by describing God's relationship with Abraham, the first one in the Jews' ancestry to whom God made special promises regarding their descendants. When he was in Mesopotamia (Ur of Chaldees), God called him to leave his land and relatives to go where God would show him (see Genesis 11:31; 12:1; 15:7; etc.) [See **map**]

Abraham did not know where God would lead him, but by faith he left his homeland trusting God to guide him (Hebrews 11:8-10). Obviously this was a major challenge to his faith. It is difficult enough to leave your home when you know where you are going. But to go, when you have no idea where you will end up, would take great faith in the one leading you.

Stringer points out that Stephen here gives some additional information to the Genesis account. He states that God had appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia, before he moved to Haran. This was in fact the reason why Abraham moved to Haran. This detail is omitted in the Genesis account.

By referring to "the God of glory," Stephen showed great respect for God, as he does throughout the speech. This defused the charge that he had blasphemed God. Likewise, his history throughout identified him-

self with the Israelite nation and showed great respect for their ancestors, especially Abraham at this point. All this tended to disprove the charges of his disrespect for Jewish law and heritage.

7:4,5 – Abraham traveled from Haran to Canaan, the land which God promised to give to him and his descendants.

Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees and moved to Haran, where his father Terah died. From there God led him to Palestine or the land of Canaan (Genesis 11:27-12:5). (Note: Stringer explains a mistaken concept some have about the age of Terah when and where he died. See his notes for an explanation.)

Abraham, however, was a sojourner in the land, never really possessing it as his own. The Canaanites still lived in the land and possessed it. Nevertheless, God promised to give the land to Abraham's descendants, despite the fact he had no child at the time of the promise! (compare Genesis 12:6,7; Hebrews 11:9-12).

This is one of the three major parts of God's promise to Abraham regarding his descendants. God promised to make them a great nation, to give them the land of Canaan, and that through them would come a great blessing on all nations (see Genesis 12:1-7; 13:15,17; 15:5,7,18; 18:18; 22:17,18; 24:7; 26:4; 28:4; 32:12; Exodus 32:13). All this would come true through his descendants, but at the time he had no descendants though he was an old man.

This too would take great faith on Abraham's part to accept. In fact, Abraham tried numerous ways to bring about the fulfillment despite the fact he and his true wife Sarah had no real son. God insisted the fulfillment would come through a son of Abraham and Sarah. Finally, Isaac was born when Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90. Some have denied that God has fulfilled these promises to Abraham. But that they have been fulfilled can be proved by the present passage as well as Joshua 23:14; 21:43-45; 1 Kings 8:56; Nehemiah 9:8; Galatians 3:8,16; Acts 3:25,26.

Note that Abraham did purchase a plot of land for a burial plot. However, this did not constitute an "inheritance" as God has promised; nor did Abraham dwell on the land but used it for burial of family members who died.

7:6,7 – Israel would be oppressed 400 years in a foreign land, then would serve God in Canaan.

Since God had made these promises regarding Abraham's descendants, the history of the Old Testament consists of tracing these descendants and the events God accomplished in them. One thing God had told Abraham was that his descendants would be slaves in a foreign land where they would be oppressed 400 years. But God would bring judgment on the nation that held them in bondage, so they would leave the land to serve God.

This was predicted to Abraham in Genesis 15:13-16. It was fulfilled in the Egyptian bondage, as Stephen explained subsequently. The judgment on Egypt came in the ten plagues which culminated in the death of the firstborn sons in all the households of Egypt. When Pharaoh said the Israelites could leave, he later changed his mind and pursued them. He and his army were all drowned in the Red Sea when they tried to pursue the Israelites who had crossed miraculously. See Exodus 1-15.

The last part of Acts 7:7 was spoken, not directly to Abraham, but rather to Moses who recorded the life of Abraham. God had told Moses, when He appeared to him on Mt. Sinai, that He would use Moses to release the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and then they would come and serve Him “on this mountain” (Mt. Sinai – Exodus 3:1-12). This was fulfilled when Israel, having left Egypt, received the law at Sinai.

There are some difficulties in determining how the 400 years mentioned here should be counted and how the various records of the period should be harmonized. This is technical material. I refer others to comments such as those by Stringer on this verse.

7:8 – God gave the covenant of circumcision which was practiced by Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and his twelve sons.

Having given Abraham the promises regarding his descendants, God gave him the covenant of circumcision (Genesis 17:9-14; 21:2-4). A covenant is a promise or testament, sometimes a mutual promise or agreement. In this case, it refers to the token or outward sign of the promises God had given to Abraham. On the eighth day after birth, every male was to be circumcised in his foreskin as a sign he had been born as a descendant of Abraham and therefore an heir of the promise made by God to Abraham.

This covenant necessarily became of major importance to every Jew. Anyone who was not circumcised was not counted a Jew or an heir of these great promises. So the practice was passed on to future generations, in fulfillment of God’s command. The generations were Abraham, then Isaac, then Jacob (Israel), then the twelve sons of Jacob who became the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel. A “patriarch” is a father or head of a family or tribe. Isaac was circumcised in fulfillment of God’s command, as were the others named and their descendants. Future generations continued the practice as God had said, and it was of cardinal importance to them.

Note that, despite the difficulties discussed earlier, in which Abraham had no descendants at the time of God’s promise, here we see that God did fulfill the promise and give him descendants.

Stephen’s approach was to make use of the familiar points of Jewish history and especially of God’s relationship with Israel. He had been accused of disrespecting Moses’ customs. By reminding the people of their history, he showed that he respected God’s acts as revealed in the Old Testament. However, having shown the significance of these, he will

later convict his hearers of being the ones who really were rejecting God's will, as had their ancestors as recorded in their own Scriptures. Before he is done, he will, in fact, accuse them of being uncircumcised in heart – the ultimate insult to a Jew. They had violated the inner meaning of God's covenant to them.

It is interesting that the covenant of circumcision came into effect before Sinai and the Ten Commands, yet it was done away in Christ's death (Acts 15; Galatians 3-5; etc.). Some people argue that laws given before Sinai are still in effect today and not done away by Jesus. Yet here is one that was made before Sinai, yet it too clearly ceased when Jesus died.

7:9,10 – Joseph's brothers sold him to be a slave in Egypt, but God made him governor of the land.

Stephen's account of Jewish history continued as he recalled how the sons of Jacob treated one of their brothers. Joseph was his father's favorite son because he was the son of his father's favorite wife. Jacob gave him a coat of many colors. Joseph also had dreams that upset his brothers. In these dreams Joseph was pictured as having authority over his whole family.

Anger and envy led Joseph's brothers to sell him to a band of passing merchants who, in turn, took him as a slave to Egypt where he was sold to Potiphar (see Genesis 37).

One may think that such terrible treatment was a sign of God's disfavor or at least of His neglect and indifference. One might become so discouraged that he would be convinced God did not care for him at all. On the contrary, however, God was watching over Joseph the whole time, for He needed someone in Egypt to bring about the rescue of His chosen people from famine and the fulfillment of the prediction they would become slaves in Egypt.

Joseph suffered many hardships in Egypt. He was falsely accused, imprisoned, forgotten, and neglected. But through it all he remained true to God, and God was being true to Him.

God used all this as a means for Joseph to eventually become governor of the whole land second only to Pharaoh himself. This happened because Joseph was able to interpret dreams of the Pharaoh showing there would be seven years of plenty in the land followed by seven years of famine. The Pharaoh then chose Joseph to rule the land in the time of plenty to prepare for the time of famine. (See Genesis 39-41).

So, God used Joseph's misfortunes to put him in the very place God needed him to be when the time of famine came. God used him, as the story shows, to save his people from the famine and preserve them alive in Egypt so God could fulfill His promises to Abraham regarding them.

7:11,12 – A famine brought Jacob’s sons to Egypt.

God’s prediction through Pharaoh’s dream came true as a great famine occurred in Egypt. However, the famine also included the region of Canaan where Jacob and his family lived. This led to the eventual fulfillment of the prediction to Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved in a foreign land.

Jacob and his sons lacked necessary food, but Jacob heard there was grain in Egypt, so he sent the “fathers” (patriarchs, Jacob’s sons who became heads of the 12 tribes of Israel) to go to Egypt to get grain (see Genesis 41,42). All the brothers went except Benjamin, whom Jacob kept at home to protect him because Benjamin was now the favorite in Joseph’s place. The reason the grain was available in Egypt, of course, was that God had revealed the matter to Joseph through Pharaoh’s dream, and Pharaoh had instructed Joseph to save up grain for the famine.

7:13 – Eventually Joseph revealed himself to his family.

The first time his brothers came to Egypt for grain, Joseph had recognized them, but they did not recognize him. Many years had passed, they did not know where he had gone after they sold him, and they could not imagine he might be ruler of Egypt. He determined to test them to see if they had repented or if they were jealous of Benjamin, the youngest brother, as they had been of him.

He accused them of being spies and said they must bring back Benjamin to prove they were speaking the truth. He kept Simeon as hostage. When the brothers came for grain the second time, they brought Benjamin. When they left, he put his silver cup in Benjamin’s bag of grain, then accused him of being a thief. The other brothers went to great lengths to protect Benjamin, even to the point that Judah offered to stay as prisoner in Benjamin’s place. This convinced Joseph that they had truly repented, so he made himself known to them, forgave them, and made them known to Pharaoh. This becomes a powerful lesson to us regarding repentance and forgiveness. (Genesis 42-45)

7:14 – Joseph then brought his family to Egypt.

Knowing that several years of famine remained, Joseph moved Jacob and his family to Egypt where they could be provided for. So Joseph’s sufferings actually became the means, not just of reconciliation with his brothers, but of preserving the whole family from death in the famine. This is a powerful lesson in God’s providential care for His people. No one involved in the story had any way to know this would be the outcome, yet God was working despite the suffering, and through the suffering, to bring good to His people. (Genesis 45-47)

Regarding the number of people recorded here (75), as compared to Genesis 46:27; Exodus 1:5; Deuteronomy 10:22, see notes in McGarvey, Coffman, and Stringer. See the introductory note on this chapter showing that the Jews did not attempt to argue with Stephen on these points,

so the Jews knew there was no problem in Stephen's account regardless of whether or not we are aware of how the difficulties are explained.

7:15,16 – Jacob died in Egypt and was taken back to Canaan for burial.

Jacob did sojourn in Egypt in his old age. When he died, they carried his body back to Canaan for burial. When his sons died, they were also brought back to Shechem and buried in the cave of Machpelah that Abraham had bought to bury Sarah in when she died. Note how this demonstrates that Abraham owned no property in Canaan despite God's promise. He did not even own a place to bury his wife till he bought this property.

Stringer again identifies some criticisms of Stephen's account here. But once again, had he made a mistake, the rulers trying him would surely have pointed it out. If they raised no issue regarding his account, then there would be no way that anyone today, millennia later, could prove him wrong.

See Genesis 47:30; 49:28-50:13; compare Genesis 23.

7:17-19 – A later Pharaoh oppressed Israel even commanding them to kill their children.

God had promised that Abraham's descendants would become a great nation and inherit the land of Canaan. The time of fulfillment of this promise came near, and the people indeed were multiplying in Egypt. Note that modern premillennialists say these promises have still not been fulfilled, but Stephen affirmed that the time had drawn near in the days of the Old Testament.

However, God had also predicted the people would be enslaved in a foreign land. This was fulfilled as a king arose who did not know Joseph. The Israelites had been protected because of Joseph's influence and the good he had done the nation, but as time passed Joseph was forgotten and the people were made slaves to labor for the Egyptians.

Specifically, the Egyptians became afraid the Israelites would become so numerous they would rebel and overthrow the Egyptian government, so they began requiring the Israelites to kill all their male children. The king told the Egyptians to cast male Israelite children into the river to drown them (Exodus 1).

Note the parallel between this and modern abortion. Our society sometimes kills babies that have been born, but more commonly medical techniques are used to kill them before they are born if they are unwanted. Either way is murder and both are abominations to God. Had Pharaoh faced the same problem today, he would doubtless have simply required the women to have abortions, and modern liberal population control proponents would have made a hero out of him.

7:20,21 – When Moses was born, his parents hid him three months, but then he was raised by Pharaoh’s daughter.

God had predicted that Abraham’s descendants would be afflicted by a foreign nation, but also that He would deliver them and punish the nation. As the time for this delivery drew near, Moses was born. Like Abraham, Moses was a great hero to the Jews. Stephen’s account shows his respect for Moses, not disrespect as he was accused.

The story of Moses’ early years is briefly told (see Exodus 2 for Old Testament details). He was brought up 3 months in his parents’ house, instead of being killed as the Egyptians wanted. Hebrews 11:23 lists this as an act of faith. Stephen does not emphasize the point, but his account reminds the Jews that Moses’ parents rejected the commands of Pharaoh, even as the apostles had rejected the commands of the Jewish council to cease preaching truth. The rulers approved Moses’ parents, but condemned the apostles.

However, the time came when Moses could no longer be hidden, so his mother put him in the river, not to be killed as the Egyptians wanted, but in a little ark made of bulrushes. There he was found by Pharaoh’s daughter who took pity on him. She determined to raise him, but for his early years he was raised by an Israelite woman. His sister Miriam had followed the ark to see what would happen. When she saw Pharaoh’s daughter find him, she offered to get an Israelite woman to nurse him, and the woman she found was his own mother! Presumably this explains how he later knew of his connection to the Hebrews.

Though Pharaoh wanted Israelite boys killed, this Israelite boy was instead raised as part of Pharaoh’s own household by an Israelite woman at the express wish of Pharaoh’s daughter. This shows that some people can be kind and compassionate even in cruel societies and cruel families. Above all it shows God’s providence working out His will, even as He had done through Joseph’s trials.

7:22 – As a result, Moses received an Egyptian education.

Moses was brought to the Pharaoh’s palace to be raised. (One wonders what the Pharaoh knew or thought about this.) There he was instructed as if he was the real son of the Pharaoh’s daughter. He was well educated in Egyptian wisdom, as befitting royalty. He was mighty in words and conduct (this may refer to written words, since he himself later told God he could not speak well). Some believe he would have become Pharaoh soon had he not fled Egypt. In any case, he must have been somewhere in the line of succession.

One would think this training and influential position would give him the perfect advantageous situation to help the Israelites if he desired to do so. The subsequent story shows that this occurred to him and he wanted to help them. But God did not use him with his material advantages. He first took away the advantages and then used him.

7:23-25 – Moses killed an Egyptian to defend an Israelite, thinking that people would accept him as a deliverer.

Exodus 2:11ff then tells of events that occurred when Moses was grown (Stephen says he was about 40 years old). He went out to visit his people the Israelites. Presumably his mother had taught him he was an Israelite as she raised him for Pharaoh's daughter. Perhaps even Pharaoh's daughter had told him.

He saw an Egyptian smiting an Israelite. Since the Israelites were slaves, this presumably was not uncommon. Moses took the Israelite's side and, seeing no one else around (either the Israelite had fled or was unconscious or else it means he saw no Egyptian around), he killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. One wonders at this. His reasons are explained, yet the method seems extreme. Nevertheless, this is what happened.

Stephen explains (though Exodus did not) that Moses did this thinking he could deliver the Israelites; he thought they would understand this too, but they did not. Perhaps this thought had come from his mother. Perhaps it was his own idea. It is doubtful that he expected to set the Israelites free so they could leave the country (as God later accomplished), but he apparently thought he could at least use his position and training to help their conditions.

Why the Israelites did not accept his offer of help is not stated either. Perhaps they did not trust him because he had been raised in the very family of their main oppressor.

7:26-28 – When Moses attempted to reconcile quarreling Israelites, he learned the death of the Egyptian was known.

Moses continued his efforts to help the Israelites. The next day he tried to settle a dispute between two Israelites. He said they were brethren so they should not wrong one another. However, the one who was in the wrong rejected him, asking who gave him the right to judge and rule them. Then he asked if he would kill him as he had killed the Egyptian.

This showed Moses that, though he thought no one saw him kill the Egyptian, yet the matter was known to the Israelites. It also showed him that, contrary to his expectations, the Israelites were not ready to accept his leadership. Exodus 2:13 says the matter then became known to Pharaoh and he wanted to kill Moses. So Moses fled.

Stephen told this story, however, because it introduced the main point for which he was reviewing Jewish history. Moses wanted to help the Israelites, but instead of appreciating his help, they rejected him (see verse 35). Stephen then developed this point showing how they rejected other prophets. This would lead to his main conclusion.

7:29 – Moses fled to Midian and there had two sons.

In Midian, according to Exodus 2:16ff, Moses met the daughters of a priest named Reuel. He assisted them, so Reuel asked him to dwell with his family. Eventually Moses married one of the daughters named Zipporah. They had two sons.

Hebrews 11:24-26 praises Moses as an example of faith in that he was willing to give up his advantages, choosing instead to suffer mistreatment with God's people. He saw there were greater advantages to emphasize than material ones. We need to have the same kind of faith to be saved.

It is interesting that God did not use Moses to deliver Israel at age 40 when he had so many advantages. Instead he allowed him to be stripped of those advantages and then 40 years later he used him at a time when he had no apparent advantages whatever. One wonders why God so chose. It is not that God objects to using people who have advantages: He used Esther in similar circumstances. Why then?

There may be several reasons. Maybe Moses was trusting himself and his physical advantages instead of trusting God. Maybe the people were not ready or the timing was otherwise not right. Maybe Moses was not old and wise enough yet.

In any case it is clear that God chose not to use Moses at age 40 when he had material wealth, power, and advantage. He did use him at age 80 when he had nothing but a staff and God. This proves God does not need our material advantages to accomplish his purposes.

We must learn this today. Often we think people in the church (ourselves or others) can accomplish much because they have wealth, influence, education, etc. With some, this becomes a rationalization to hold on to what God wants them to give up. We must be willing to give up anything of this life that stands in the way of our serving God. If we can use our blessings for God without compromising His will, fine. But if they hinder us, we must make whatever sacrifices are necessary to accomplish His will. In other cases, the advantages may not be wrong to have, but God does not need them and we must not trust them. The people God uses most effectively may be those who have none of these material advantages, but they deeply trust in God.

7:30 – God appeared to Moses in the burning bush.

Moses was in Midian about 40 years. This would make him about 80 years old (compare verse 23). Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a burning bush in the wilderness of Mt. Sinai. Exodus 3 records this event, saying the bush was burning but was not consumed (Exodus 3:2.3).

Evidently this event served first to get Moses' attention. But it also accomplished the purpose of all miracles in that it demonstrated to Moses that the message he was receiving really was from God. Moses would need great faith to do the job God intended to give him. He needed to be

sure that it was really what God wanted him to do. As in many of His revelations, God accompanied the message with proof that it really was His word.

Perhaps this was especially needed in this case because Moses had tried once, in his own way, to help Israel, but had been rejected and had failed. Perhaps he failed because he lacked faith in God and was trusting in his own abilities (see notes on v29). In any case, we will see that, by the time God called him, Moses had become convinced he could not do the job, so he objected. Great evidence was needed to persuade him that this was really what God wanted.

7:31-33 – God called Moses from the bush.

God identified Himself to Moses as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This was a common expression for the God of the Bible, in contrast to the heathen idols falsely worshiped by many in that day. He was the God who had made great promises to these patriarchs about their descendants. Moses and the Israelites were those descendants, so God had special meaning to them. (See Matthew 22:23-33 for Jesus' reference to this passage and how it confirms that the dead will be raised.)

Moses trembled at the presence of God and could not look at the place of His presence. God told him to take off his sandals because he was standing on holy ground. Ground is not holy of itself. It was holy in the sense that the presence of God made it holy (dedicated or set apart) for His purpose. This seems to be simply a way to emphasize to Moses the seriousness of the occasion and the need to respect God and the message being delivered. Also, this was the same mountain where God would later give the law, so again the ground was holy in the purpose to which God was using it.

Stephen had been accused of speaking blasphemy against Moses (6:11). He did not deal directly with the charge; but his discussion of Israelite history showed, not just that He did not blaspheme Moses, but that he respected Moses and the Jewish leaders were the ones who disrespected Moses.

7:34 – God stated His intent to use Moses to deliver the Israelites from slavery.

God was concerned about His people. Many of them (perhaps including Moses) probably thought they were suffering because God had abandoned them. Moses had earlier been concerned enough to try to help the people, but his efforts came to nothing. Here God assured him that He was aware of the problem, cared about the people, and was going to deliver them. He had told Abraham the people would suffer in Egypt but would be delivered (verses 6,7). Even today God sees the suffering of His people, but sometimes He allows it to continue because He has higher and greater purposes to fulfill.

He then told Moses that He would send him to Egypt. The Exodus account shows that Moses understood that God meant to use him as the means of delivering the people, but Moses made excuses and did not think he should be the one to do the job (Exodus chapter 3&4). Forty years earlier he thought he should do the job (verses 23-29), but it was not God's time.

Man's ways are not God's ways. When Moses thought he could do the job, God did not allow it. God used Moses at the time when he was so humble he thought he could not do the job. We need to be humble too. And sometimes the person God can use best is the one who is convinced he cannot do the job. (See notes on verse 29.)

7:35 – Stephen concluded that God used as a ruler the one whom the people rejected.

Stephen then introduced an observation which eventually would relate powerfully to his main theme. The very man that the people had rejected (as expressed by the Israelite who said, "Who made you a ruler...?") was in fact the very man God had appointed to be the ruler and deliverer for the people.

Stephen stated no conclusion at this point, but just made the observation. The people's evaluation of who should be their ruler was not the same as God's. By the time of Stephen's day, all Jews recognized Moses' authority and leadership, but many people in **Moses'** day had rejected Him. Stephen would later parallel this to the people's treatment of Jesus, who was being rejected by the very people Stephen was addressing.

7:36 – Moses led the people out of Egypt with signs and wonders.

Stephen here evaluated the success of this one that God appointed but the people rejected. He had great success, for he brought the people out of bondage, just like God had said he would. His work was accomplished and confirmed by means of great miracles which proved God's power was in Him and which enabled him to defeat his enemies. Yet the people in his day had rejected him.

The signs and wonders of Moses included the following: his hand turned leprous and back again, and his rod turned to a serpent and back again (Exodus 4,7); the 10 plagues, including the death of the firstborn (Exodus 7-12); parting the Red Sea and the death of Pharaoh's army (Exodus 14); producing water and all that the people needed in their journey (Exodus 15-17), etc. Many other signs occurred at the giving of the law as God spoke from the mountain, the death of Korah and his company when they rebelled, etc.

Surely such miracles were the basis that should have convinced the people that Moses was from God. But this was the very same reason why the people should have acknowledged Jesus to be from God, because He had done miracles as great or greater than Moses did.

7:37 – But Moses had predicted another prophet like himself to whom the people must hearken.

Stephen here began to draw his main points more to the open. Everyone in the audience agreed that Moses was from God, but Moses had predicted another prophet similar to himself that the people should listen to. This was predicted in Deuteronomy 18:15ff. Peter had used this prophecy as proof for Jesus in Acts 3:22,23 (see notes there).

Jesus was clearly the one predicted by Moses. Note the ways according to this context in which Moses was similar to Jesus:

- * Both were lawgivers (verses 35,38).
- * Both were judges (verse 35)
- * Both delivered God's people from bondage (verses 34,35)
- * Both wrought great signs & wonders (verse 36)
- * Both began a "church" (verse 38; compare Matthew 16:18)
- * Both were prophets (verse 37)
- * Both were rejected by the people (verses 35,39-41,52)

The fact that Jesus had been predicted by Moses himself ought to have conclusively answered all the charges made against Stephen by these people. Note that the prophecy said the people must listen to this prophet (Jesus), but the Jewish people Stephen addressed had absolutely refused to listen to Him. If Moses predicted Jesus and the people accepted Moses' authority, then the people should accept Jesus and stop opposing Stephen. While Stephen had not yet directly stated this conclusion, it was clearly where he was leading.

Jesus' work and teaching were not contrary to Moses or the law or God's will, as the people had accused Stephen of teaching. Instead, His work was actually the fulfillment of the law and the very thing for which Moses' work had been preparing the way!

7:38 – Moses led the people in the wilderness and gave them living oracles.

Stephen here continued describing Moses as the one who received revelations from God, especially the Law of Moses. In the wilderness, an angel spoke to him on Mt. Sinai, and he received living oracles to give the people.

"Oracle" means a word or statement, especially here a Divine utterance (Vine) (compare Romans 3:2; Hebrews 5:12; 1 Peter 4:11). They were living oracles in that they were from the living God, showing how to live life as God wanted it, and perhaps especially how to have spiritual life by a proper relationship with God (compare Hebrews 4:12).

Moses was the law-giver through whom the Old Testament law was revealed, just as Jesus is the law-giver through whom the New Testament was revealed.

That the law was revealed through angels is confirmed in Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19; Hebrews 2:2.

7:39-41 – Israel rejected Moses again later when they made the golden calf to worship.

Though Moses was so great and was looked upon with unshakable honor by the people in Stephen's day, yet in fact Moses had been **rejected** by the Israelites in his own day. They disobeyed him, rebelled against him, repeatedly complained against his leadership, and more than once expressed the wish that they had stayed in Egypt and never followed him at all. Note that it was not just the one Israelite in Egypt who had rejected Moses' leadership, when Moses had tried to reconcile him to his fellow-Israelite. Rather, Stephen showed that the whole nation had been guilty.

A specific instance cited by Stephen occurred while Moses was on the mountain receiving the law (Exodus 32). At this very time, the people became impatient, not knowing what had happened to Moses. They demanded that Aaron make them gods to worship, so he made them a calf. When Moses came down from the mountain, he rebuked Aaron, ground the calf to powder and made the people drink it on their water, and caused 3000 people to be slain in punishment.

This is just one of many instances in which the people rebelled against Moses. They rebelled again when they refused to enter the promised land because they feared the inhabitants (Numbers 13,14). Korah, Dathan, and Abiram led a rebellion against Moses (Numbers 16). The people also rebelled when water was lacking and when they tired of the manna. These are just a few of the many examples.

Stephen was impressing a major truth on these people. They needed to realize that their ancestors had regularly and with great consistency **rejected** their great leaders **during the lifetime** of the men. This began with the founder and revealer of their law – Moses himself. Why then should they or modern Jews find it so unthinkable that they should have rejected the Messiah when He came – the prophet who was like Moses? The amazing thing would have been if they had **not** rejected Him!

7:42,43 – Israel committed idolatry, as their own Scriptures recorded, so would be sent into captivity.

In these verses Stephen quoted Amos 5:25ff. Not just during Moses' lifetime did the Israelites reject God's leaders and His revelations. They did it repeatedly, especially when they frequently turned to worship other gods.

They worshiped the host of heaven – the heavenly bodies (sun, moon, stars – Deuteronomy 4:19; 17:2-5; 2 Kings 23:5; 17:16, note verses 7-23; 21:3). Idolatrous people often worshiped heavenly bodies, but God had repeatedly warned Israel to not worship them because they were created things, not the Creator Himself. Many of these people were involved in astrology, which is based on this idolatrous worship of the heavenly bodies. Astrology today still attributes to heavenly bodies the

powers which belong only to God. To practice astrology is to disobey God like Israel did.

Israel had offered sacrifices to God in the wilderness, but the statement implies a criticism (see NASB). They did not really mean their worship of Him, or they would not also have worshiped the false gods of Moloch (Molech, Malcam) and Rephan (Remphan).

Moloch was an Ammonite Deity often worshiped by sacrificing children to him. Worship of such gods was sternly forbidden by God (Leviticus 18:21; 20:1-5), yet Solomon and other kings were involved (1 Kings 11:7; 2 Chronicles 33:6; Zephaniah 1:5; Ezekiel 23:37-39; Jeremiah 7:9-11; 19:4-13). Note that, in some of these passages, worship of Molech is associated with worship of the hosts of heaven. God let Israel be defeated by enemies because of this sin (Psalm 106:35-42) (*Zondervan's Pictorial Bible Dictionary*).

Rephan (Remphan) is probably the name for Chium, or Saturn, according to *Zondervan's Pictorial Bible Dictionary*.

God specifically warned they would go into Babylonian captivity for idolatry. He gave up on them because they persisted in this sin, and they in fact went into Babylonian captivity 70 years. Surely this captivity – a period well-known in Jewish history – ought to warn the Jews of Stephen's day that their nation had repeatedly disobeyed and rebelled against the message of Gods' prophets.

7:44-46 – Moses gave Israel the tabernacle until David sought to build the temple.

Something else Moses had provided for Israel was the tabernacle. This was ordained by God and had to be built according to a very precise pattern that God had revealed to Moses. See Exodus 25-31.

This tabernacle had been the special place where God required sacrifices to be offered. It was furnished according to His precise commands, each article of furniture having special uses (many of them symbolic of New Testament practices).

Moses' successor Joshua brought that tabernacle into the promised land of Canaan (Joshua 3:14-17; 18:1). This happened when the Israelites entered the land, drove out the inhabitants, and thereby inherited the land as God had promised Abraham. Here Stephen showed the fulfillment of the second part of God's promise to Abraham: his seed would receive the land of Canaan. That this has been fulfilled, contrary to the claims of premillennialists, is expressly stated by Joshua in Joshua 23:14; 21:43-45.

Then a later great character in the Jews' history was David. The tabernacle continued in the land until his day, but he wanted to build God a permanent house instead of the tabernacle (2 Samuel 7:1-7). This was disallowed because of his many wars, but God said David's son would build the temple (1 Kings 5:3-5).

Stephen had been accused of blaspheming the temple and saying Jesus would destroy it. Here Stephen showed his respect for the temple as part of God's plan. What he was preaching was not a contradiction to God's plan, but in harmony with it.

7:47-50 – Solomon built the temple, though no building could contain God.

Though David had not been allowed to build the temple, his son Solomon did build it (1 Kings 5-8). God had authorized the temple, yet He did not accept the physical limitations of it. Stephen quoted Isaiah 66:1f to remind them that even the Temple they had built for God could not hold Him. God dwells in heaven, with earth as His footstool (actually showing that, in a sense He is everywhere at once, or at least He knows what is everywhere and controls it all). All things belong to God, so how could He be contained in a building? Humans are physically limited. If we have a house to live in, we are glad to own that much. But God owns it all, so how can He be limited to one place?

This would remind Stephen's hearers that they should not trust in the physical temple. They had made accusations against him regarding the building. But their blessings had never been based on the existence of the building but on the faithfulness of men to God. Stephen was showing that, though he did not disrespect the building as they accused, yet they had too great an attachment to the physical building. They emphasized external appearances thinking, among other things, that as long as they had the temple they would have God's approval. They should instead have been attached to God.

7:51-53 – Stephen convicted the Jewish leaders of killing Jesus like their ancestors persecuted the prophets.

Stephen then brought his defense to a crashing climax – one that surely must have completely caught the hearers unprepared. They thought **he** was defending **himself** to them – that **he** was on trial before **them**. But Stephen turned the tables and showed that it was not he that was on trial, but **they** were on trial before God. He was not the guilty one, but **they** were guilty. What a tremendous method to use in teaching. Build a case from authority that the people accept, then show how **their** evidence proves **your** case and shows **them** to be in error!

Stephen had laid the groundwork for this conclusion by showing that the Jewish ancestors had repeatedly rejected God's prophets.

In fact, which one had they **not** rejected? Rather than itemizing the ones **rejected**, could they find any to list that had been **accepted in their lifetime** (Compare Nehemiah 9:20-30; 2 Chronicles 36:15,16; Luke 11:46-51; John 5:39-47.)?

In the same way, these very Jews in Stephen's day had rejected the great One whom these other prophets had foretold! In fact, they were

responsible for his death. They had demanded that the Romans crucify Jesus and had called for His blood to be on them and on their children – Matthew 27:25. Considering their history, who could be surprised? Why were they criticizing Stephen? He was only saying they had done what their own history and prophets had predicted they would do.

Stephen's manner of pointing this out would surely strike home with any Jew. He said that they not only resisted the Holy Spirit (by rejecting what He taught), but in fact they had failed to keep the law God gave them, and they were uncircumcised in heart and ears! Such terrible accusations to make against a Jew! Accuse him of anything, but nothing could be so serious as to charge him with being uncircumcised and untrue to the law! Circumcision was the very symbol of Judaism. To be uncircumcised and untrue to the law was to not be a Jew at all (see verse 8)!

These Jews were clearly circumcised in flesh. Stephen's point is that this is not enough, though these people apparently thought it was. Their problem was they were outwardly set aside to God, but their *hearts* were not set aside to His service. They were devoted, not to God's service, but to selfish interests, so they rejected His word. (Compare Romans 2:28,29.)

They had accused Stephen of seeking to change Moses' law (6:14). Now he said that in fact he was preaching what truly was in accord with the law, but *they* were the ones who violated it by rejecting the One whom the law was preparing them to receive!

Let us summarize the facts from Jewish history, as presented by Stephen, that support the conclusion that Jesus was the one whom they should receive:

1. God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus.
2. Jesus was the prophet whom Moses had predicted.
3. Other prophets had predicted Jesus.
4. The Jews had rejected Jesus, just like their nation throughout its history had rejected God's prophets, and just like those prophets had predicted they would do to the Messiah!

Stephen's sermon was interrupted, so we cannot know exactly how he would have stated his conclusion had he been allowed to do so. However, it is clear from the points he has made that God's dealings with the nation of Israel were not for their own primary benefit, and certainly not because they were so righteous that they should all be rewarded. Just being a Jew in the lineage of Abraham and just having the temple did not make one pleasing to God.

The Jews were often in error, yet God used them for His purpose. This purpose came to a climax in Jesus. True to their history, the Jews failed to recognize Him and fulfilled their prophecies by killing Him.

They should not think God would overlook this and justify them just because they were descendants of Abraham and had the temple. They should realize that they could receive the ultimate blessings God had for them only if they accepted Jesus.

A lesson for us also to learn is that, if God's people in the Old Testament had apostatized from his way so consistently, why should it be thought a strange thing that people who claim to serve God, since the first century, have repeatedly apostatized? We are continually warned in the gospel to be on guard for the same problem (1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Acts 20:28ff; 2 Timothy 4:2ff; 1 Timothy 4:1ff; etc.).

The Old Testament was written for our learning, and one of the main lessons to be taught is that people, in general, never live apart from sin for very long (1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Romans 15:4; 3:9-20; Galatians 3; etc.). Why then should it be surprising to observe the many apostasies that have occurred resulting in Catholicism, Protestantism, and other errors in Jesus' church since the first century?

7:54 – The rulers themselves then attacked Stephen.

The nature of Stephen's sermon was such that it had an effect on the hearers. All Bible teaching moves people to do one of two things: either they respond favorably with faith and obedience, or they are driven to reject the message. God's word is a powerful message that cuts to the heart (Romans 1:16; Hebrews 4:12). It produces penitence or rejection.

In this case it cut the listeners to the heart, resulting in anger to the point the people gnashed at Stephen with their teeth (some translations say "gnashed on him")! Either they physically bit him – incredible as that is to think of grown people doing – or they were so angry they ground their teeth together in anger.

Peter's sermon in Acts 2, though approached in a different way, had the same theme and the same application as Stephen's sermon. Both lessons were designed to prove to the people that they had killed Jesus, the sinless Son of God. In Acts 2 the people were pricked in the heart, repented, and obeyed. Here they were cut to the heart and rejected both the message and the messenger. The difference was not in the message or the messenger but in the hearts of the people (compare the parable of the sower in Matthew 13).

Some people, when they hear the truth and are convicted, will refuse to admit their error. They are determined not to change. So rather than repent, these people did the very thing Stephen had just accused them of: they rejected God's inspired prophet and eventually killed him! Clearly the doctrine of Gamaliel had finally been rejected!

Such action, of course, did not erase the guilt of the Jewish leaders for having killed Jesus. Killing the messenger did not disprove the validity of the message. In fact, it just compounded that guilt. But their action did eliminate the source that was reminding them of their guilt. People

who don't want to accept truth, will try many ways to eliminate what reminds them of their guilt. One way is persecution of the messenger.

7:55,56 – Stephen viewed Jesus standing at God's right hand.

As the people attacked Stephen, by the power of the Holy Spirit he looked into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. For the significance of Jesus at God's right hand, see Acts 2:33 (in context) and the notes there. Here is additional proof, stated by Peter and seen by Stephen, that Jesus is at God's right hand and therefore is now King ruling over God's people. The kingdom does exist. It is not something yet coming in the future.

Note that Stephen saw this because he was full of the Holy Spirit. This was not an hallucination nor a "near-death experience" as some people claim today. Stephen was inspired and so was enabled to see what other people cannot.

The fact Stephen was full of the Spirit (compare 6:3,8,10) proves that what he said was good and right to say. His speech should not be criticized by any Bible believer. Though it resulted in his death, it needed to be said. People today are too quick to criticize preachers because people get upset when the truth is taught.

We are not told exactly why this vision of Jesus was given. No doubt it served to comfort Stephen in his time of persecution. It probably also served to strengthen other Christians who heard about it. And it may have cut even deeper in the consciences of those who opposed the truth. It surely would have conflicted with the beliefs of his audience, for they believed Jesus to be a blasphemer who had deserved to die. To hear it stated that He is on God's right hand would probably have been taken as more blasphemy.

Note that Jesus is here said to be standing at God's right hand, where other passages say He sits at God's right hand. Some try to explain the difference. However, I don't believe either expression is intended to describe a literal position which Jesus occupies at all times. Why would He sit and never stand? Why would He always be at one literal place? The idea is similar to saying a king sits on the throne ruling a nation. Surely it does not mean here is there all the time; in fact, he probably spends little time actually on the throne. The description is simply an expression to describe His exalted position, more so than a literal location.

7:57,58 – They stoned Stephen, laying their garments at the feet of Saul.

Whether because they were further convinced Stephen had spoken blasphemy, or whether they had just heard so much they completely lost their tempers, the people cried aloud, stopped their ears, threw Stephen out of the city, and stoned him to death.

This is a typical mob action. Yet the amazing thing is that it was led by the leaders of the Jewish nation, the very ones responsible for keeping the law. They had admitted to Pilate that they could not kill anyone without Roman authority, yet they killed Stephen anyway. The miscarriage of justice here is very similar to that in Jesus' case. These people just don't learn.

People may react in various ways when they refuse to accept the truth, but in one way or another they will stop their ears (compare Matthew 13:13-15; John 3:19-21). Some physically refuse to listen. They may refuse to attend church meetings, refuse to meet with people who want to tell them the truth, refuse to be around those people at all, try to get the preacher fired, or try to silence the teacher by threats or intimidation. If all else fails, killing the person stops his tongue. But it does not change the guilt of those who refuse to accept the truth.

The witnesses laid their garments at the feet of Saul of Tarsus.

It is interesting that they felt a need for witnesses (6:11-14). The law said the witnesses against a man must be first to cast stones. Despite the total illegality of this mob action, yet the love of these Jews for legal technicalities led them to still want witnesses to cast the first stones. The fact the witnesses lied and proved nothing was irrelevant!

This Scripture introduces us to Saul of Tarsus. Saul, of course, later led a great persecution against the church (8:1ff). He was eventually converted in Damascus (9:1ff), and became the apostle Paul who wrote the greatest number of New Testament books. At this point he was a young man, yet he was already involved in opposition to the gospel.

It is clear that Stephen's death made a great impression on Saul for he later mentioned that he had consented to Stephen's death (22:20). Holding the coats of those who did the actual killing was a form of fellowship. As such it helps us understand how people can be guilty of sin without physically doing it. To support or encourage those who sin is to be guilty ourselves (2 John 9-11; Romans 1:32; Ephesians 5:11; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1).

7:59 – Stephen was stoned as he called on Jesus to receive his spirit.

This shows that Stephen expected his spirit to continue to exist after death. It is also similar to Jesus' statement as He died, calling upon His Father to receive His spirit (Luke 23:46). We need confidence, when we die, that our spirits are in the hands of God.

Some claim that this example shows that it is proper for us to pray to Jesus. Yet if so, it is strange that the New Testament says so little about the practice, yet there are many examples in which we are expressly commanded to address prayers to the Father (Matthew 6:9; John 15:16; 16:23,24,26; Romans 1:8). We are taught to pray to the Father through

Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5). Many denominational folks continually address prayers to Jesus; but if this is what we should do, it would seem we could find numerous examples of it.

The unusual circumstances here make it an unconvincing argument for praying to Jesus. Stephen personally saw Jesus. It is little wonder that, seeing Jesus and knowing that he was about to leave this life, he would call out to Jesus to receive him as he died. You naturally tend to speak to one whom you see.

Saul spoke to Jesus when he saw him on the Damascus road (Acts 9), but who uses that as proof we should pray to Jesus? Saul was an unconverted sinner who did not yet believe in Jesus, but it was natural that He should speak to the One whom he saw.

Zacharias and Mary both spoke to the angel that appeared to them (Luke 1:18,34). But who would use this as evidence that we have the right to address prayers to angels?

If one today has a miraculous vision in which He truly sees Jesus, then we will grant that he may then speak to Jesus. Without such circumstances (which, of course, are impossible today), I find this a very unconvincing argument for prayer to Jesus.

7:60 – Stephen died, calling on the Lord to not lay the sin to their charge.

As the stones destroyed his life, Stephen knelt down and asked God not to charge this sin to those who committed it. Such willingness to forgive is an overwhelming example to us all. Jesus did the same as He died on the cross (Luke 23:34). Stephen clearly learned much from His Master's example. The first recorded Christian martyr died much like His Master had died.

This shows that Stephen's plain and powerful rebuke was not motivated by self-righteousness, hatred, or ill will of any kind. Many people think that, when a person powerfully rebukes sin, it must be because he himself is egotistical, judgmental, critical, self-righteous, lacking in love, etc. Yet Stephen gave a powerful rebuke, then immediately proved he did it out of love. We should do the same. When people rebuke sin today let us realize that, like Stephen, their motive may be a sincere concern for the lost.

Yet as in Jesus' case, it is clear that Stephen's prayer, by itself, did not remove the people's guilt. Saul obviously remained guilty until his conversion. But Saul also shows how the people could avoid being charged with this sin: by repenting and being forgiven.

Note further, that though Stephen had so much love, yet he still acknowledged that what they did was a **sin**. He did not deny or excuse their guilt. He had preached a forceful lesson against their errors. Great love for sinners does not lead to justifying and overlooking sin. Rather it leads to attempts to get sinners to repent and be forgiven.

Even the enemy Saul was greatly impressed by Stephen's death. No doubt it also made a great impression on the other enemies and on the Christians who knew of it. We should not underestimate its effect. Stephen was the first Christian who died for the faith as far as the record indicates. He died calmly, full of faith, with a vision of Jesus before his eyes. Imagine the impact on the church to know that, though they may have to die for their faith, yet even this can be faced with such strength. Surely this would help them remain strong and not fall away as they would be tempted to do facing such persecution.

Stephen's character is a great lesson to us all. We should imitate his knowledge of truth and ability to proclaim it, his wisdom, his courage to speak out against error, his faith as he faced persecution and death, his love for even his enemies, and all his concern for what is right.

Part 2: Spread of the Gospel in Judea and Samaria – Chapter 8-12

Acts 8

Philip's Work in Samaria — 8:1-25

8:1-4 - Persecution and the Scattering of the Church

8:1 – Saul caused great persecution, scattering the disciples from Jerusalem.

Stephen's death had been recorded in chapter 7, and Saul had held the clothes of those who stoned him (7:58). This fellowship indicated he consented to his death (compare 22:20; 26:10). There is no record that he cast a single stone, yet he sinned and was guilty before God because he consented and cooperated when he should have opposed the act. Compare Romans 1:32; Ephesians 5:11 (see notes on 7:58).

Stephen's death began a period of great persecution, in which we will see Saul had a leading role. The truth had been accepted gladly by great numbers when first preached (chapter 2). Then the leaders opposed it but tried to avoid violence (chapter 4,5). Then they tried debate, but were publicly defeated (chapter 6). Finally, they began a role of active physical persecution beginning with the stoning of Stephen and then proceeding to a general persecution. This is often the progression of hearts that harden to truth.

However, God used even this persecution as an opportunity for good. It caused Christians to leave Jerusalem and spread the gospel around the world like God wanted. At first the Christians went into Judea and Samaria, as Jesus had said they would. This began the second

major step in Jesus' prediction of how the gospel would spread (see 1:8). [See *map*.]

Note that the apostles were the only ones who were not compelled to leave Jerusalem. Why they stayed we are not told, but this will become significant later. Note that they were still in Jerusalem as recorded in verse 14.

8:2,3 – Stephen was buried, and Saul continued persecution sending men and women to prison.

Stephen's story ended as he was buried by devout men. There was great lamentation for him. The death of any Christian is sad in many ways, especially when it happens as a cruel miscarriage of justice. Death is an enemy. It was not wrong, but good and proper, to sorrow. On the other hand, we have great hope for such people and we need not sorrow as at the death of one who is in the world (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

Saul had become an active leader in the persecution, even to the point of entering homes to find Christians and drag them off to prison. What would we do in such a time of opposition? Consider what these Christians did.

8:4 – The Christians who were scattered went everywhere preaching.

Consider the zeal of the early Christians for the spread of the gospel. The people had been compelled to flee from their homes because of the persecution. This included all the members except the apostles (verse 1). Yet they went everywhere preaching the word.

This shows that **all** Christians are responsible to spread the gospel to the lost. This is not just the job of leaders like apostles, elders, and supported preachers (note that the apostles were not included among those who were scattered (verse 1). All the members were involved. (Compare 2 Timothy 2:2,24-26; Hebrews 5:12; John chapter 1&4; 1 Peter 3:15.)

They taught despite the fact they were being persecuted. One of their number had just been murdered for preaching the truth. They had all been compelled to leave Jerusalem, many of them forsaking loved ones and property. Yet they did not compromise. They continued to preach the truth. This is why the early church grew as it did. Do we today have the same zeal?

The result was that persecution actually benefited the spread of the gospel.

8:5-13 - Conversion of the Samaritans and Simon

8:5 – Philip went to Samaria and preached Christ.

Philip, being among the people who fled Jerusalem, went to Samaria and preached Christ (see *map*). Remember that Jesus had said that, after the gospel had been preached in Jerusalem, it would be

preached in Judea and Samaria (1:8). The work of Philip is here described because he was spreading the message to Samaria, as Jesus had predicted would be done.

Philip preached Christ to the Samaritans. Christ should also be the subject of our preaching. Understand, however, that this is not just preaching about who Jesus was or what He did. Preaching Christ includes preaching what He **taught** and what He requires men to do to please God (see verses 12,35ff).

Note that Philip did not go to Samaria and offer entertainment, recreation, sports, parties, games, banquets, etc., as is often done by the modern Social Gospel crowd. He talked about the message of Jesus Christ.

This Philip was the evangelist (21:8) who had been one of the seven men appointed in Jerusalem to minister to widows (6:1-6). It is not Philip the apostle, since the apostles were not scattered from Jerusalem (verse 1) but were still in Jerusalem after Philip had preached to the Samaritans (verse 14). Apostles later came from Jerusalem to give the Samaritans the power of the Holy Spirit (verses 14ff). Why was this necessary if this Philip was an apostle and already had this power?

8:6-8 – Philip did great miracles in Samaria.

Philip not only preached Christ, he also did miracles. The people listened to the message and observed the miracles. He cast out demons and healed people who had been lame or paralyzed. This resulted in great joy in the city.

As always, the main purpose of Bible miracles was to confirm that the message being presented was truly from God. Obviously these miracles were clear and convincing. Philip did not claim he could do miracles and then try to convince the people to believe him based on testimonials or even by Scriptural teaching about miracles done in the past. He proved his claim by doing miracles so the people could see for themselves their convincing nature. This is what ought to be done by people today if they claim they have power to do Bible miracles.

Remember that Jews and Samaritans were enemies by tradition (John 4:9). Their social and religious backgrounds alienated them to the point they had no dealings with one another. But Philip, like Jesus, ignored this and preached to the Samaritans because they were lost souls and the gospel is for all. When the Samaritans were converted, the barrier between them and Jewish Christians was removed. We are all one in Christ; God is no respecter of persons (10:34,35). The Jewish Christians, however, had yet to learn this was also true of Gentiles.

8:9-11 – Simon fooled the people with sorcery so they believed he had great power from God.

This Bible example reveals God's attitude toward sorcery. Sorcery is another name for witchcraft or magic. It is part of the occult, along with

astrology, divination, necromancy, etc., involving an appeal to supernatural forces other than the one true God of the Bible. Those forces may be demons, pagan gods, or spirits of dead people. Or perhaps people do not know who the forces are, but they are not the true God. This is why God has always opposed sorcery and the occult. It is a form of idolatry because it attributes Divine powers and honor to something other than God. See Deuteronomy 18:9-14; Leviticus 19:31; 20:6,27; Exodus 7:11,22; 8:7,18,19; Isaiah 8:19,20; Daniel 1:20; 2:1-13,27f; Galatians 5:19-21; Revelation 21:8; 22:15; Acts 19:18-20; 13:4-12

As in Simon's case, sorcery may have some power to amaze people. It may even be difficult for us to explain. The Samaritans were deceived to think that Simon had great power from God, so they listened to his teaching as truth. But whatever power sorcery or witchcraft involves, it is not from God; when it is compared to true miracles from God, it cannot measure up. Simon could not do what the inspired Philip could do, and even Simon was amazed at the true miracles of God (v13).

Sorcery is a fraud. Yet as in Samaria, until people know the truth and can compare sorcery to God's will and God's miracles, people may be deceived by it. When people honestly examine the truth with open hearts and compare the nature of true Bible miracles to the tricks of the occult, they will reject sorcery. Note that the sorcerer claimed that he was someone great: he used his tricks to gain honor for himself, whereas true prophets did miracles to gain honor for God.

8:12 – When Philip preached about Christ and the kingdom, men and women were baptized.

Preaching Jesus and the gospel (compare verse 5) includes preaching about the kingdom (compare 18:8). Some people think that we should not teach people about the church until after they have been converted. The Holy Spirit, who guided Philip, did not so believe. The Spirit led Philip to preach about the kingdom to people before they were baptized, but the kingdom is another term for the church (compare Matthew 16:18,19; Colossians 1:13,18; Hebrews 12:23,28).

People who are not yet saved need to hear about the church, because the church is the body of people they need to become part of to be saved. The church is that group that has been saved by Jesus' blood (Acts 2:47; 20:28; Ephesians 5:23-25), and over which He rules as Head (Ephesians 1:22,23; Ephesians 5:22ff). After conversion, people must serve God faithfully as members of the church, worshiping Him, etc. (compare 1 Corinthians 11,14; etc.). In order to properly "count the cost" of conversion (Luke 14:25-35), people need to know what they will be getting into and what will be expected of them. The church does not save us, but we must be in the church to be saved, so people need to hear about the church and understand it before they are baptized.

Philip also preached the name of Christ, which includes His will and authority (compare 4:7-12). Philip preached Christ (verse 5), but here we

are told that this includes more than just what Jesus was or did. It includes preaching His will for us about what we should do to be saved, including the importance of the church. (Colossians 1:27,28)

Note what people did in response to the gospel. As Jesus had taught in Mark 16:16, they believed and were baptized. It follows that they were saved, just as Jesus had promised. This is what the Jews on Pentecost did too. The passage says that this is what people did to respond properly when faithful preachers preached Jesus. Therefore, preaching Jesus includes preaching the need for baptism (see also on verses 35ff below). See the **chart** on conversions.

Note also that they were baptized **when** they believed, both men and women. As in all Bible examples, faithful teachers never postponed or delayed the baptism of those who had true faith and repentance. Such people were always baptized the same day. This shows the urgency of baptism, which can only be explained on the grounds that it is essential to salvation (see notes on 2:38).

Furthermore, the fact people were baptized when they believed shows that people should not be baptized before they believe. So no babies were baptized here, since they cannot believe.

8:13 – Simon also believed and was baptized, being amazed at the miracles Philip did.

Like the rest of the people, Simon was able to see the difference between true miracles and that which claimed to be “the great power of God” but was not. The same is true today. Many people claim to have power to do miracles, but they do not duplicate true Bible miracles. The purpose of miracles was to reveal and confirm new revelation from God (compare Mark 16:20; Acts 14:3; Hebrews 2:3,4; John 20:30,31; etc.). That power was no longer needed after the written word had been completed, so miraculous powers then ceased (compare 1 Corinthians 13:8-13). People received the power to do miracles after Pentecost only by the direct involvement of apostles (see notes on verses 14-22). But there are no apostles today (compare 1:21,22); so there is no way people today can obtain miracles.

This is why modern “miracles” do not measure up to those of the Bible. The characteristics of Bible miracles always demonstrated them to be impossible by natural law. When we carefully observe the characteristics of miracles done by Jesus, the apostles, Philip, etc., we will see that what are claimed to be miracles today simply do not have the same characteristics that identify Bible miracles. Modern “miracles” are fakes that differ from true miracles just as Simon’s powers differed from true miracles.

When men had true miracle power from God, they did not hesitate to use that power in the presence of false teachers and false miracle workers. Some today claim they can do miracles but will not do them in

the presence of those who deny their power. Philip did miracles in Simon's presence; many other true prophets of God did likewise. They knew they had greater power than the false teachers and that comparing the power would show who really had the message from God. See John 11:47,48; Acts 13:6-12; 4:10,14-16; 9:1-18; 19:11-17; Exodus 8:17-19; 1 Kings 18:20-40; Daniel 2. It is both proper and good for us to compare the characteristics of so-called miracles to the true Bible miracles.

Because Simon later sinned (verses 14ff), some claim that he never truly believed but only tricked Philip by pretending he believed. But that simply cannot be true, since Luke definitely records that Simon believed and was baptized. This is not the impression left upon Philip, but the record inspired by the Holy Spirit. Note also that Simon "also" believed and was baptized. He did exactly what the other Samaritans did and exactly what Jesus said to do in Mark 16:16. If the other Samaritans were saved, he was saved too. We will see that later he fell into sin and needed to repent to be forgiven. It will not do to claim, as "once saved always saved" folks do, that he was never saved.

8:14-25 - The Giving of the Holy Spirit and the Sin of Simon

8:14-16 – The apostles sent Peter and John so the Samaritans could receive the Holy Spirit.

The apostles in Jerusalem heard about the reception the Samaritans gave to the gospel, and they sent Peter and John who prayed so the people could receive the Holy Spirit. The Samaritans had been baptized in Jesus' name, so their sins were forgiven, but they did not yet have the Holy Spirit. (Note that "receiving" the word of God means much more than just listening to it. One must believe and obey it as the Samaritans did.)

This shows that, even in the first century when valid miracles were occurring, not all saved people had Holy Spirit baptism or the power to do miracles. The Samaritans had been baptized in Jesus' name. This was water baptism for forgiveness of sins (compare v12,13; 2:38; 10:47,48; 19:1-7; 8:37-39; Mark 16:15,16; Matthew 28:19,20; 3:11). This would make them Christians so they would have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (see notes on Acts 2:38; compare 5:32; Romans 8:9,11; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). But there was a sense in which they did not have the Holy Spirit, and had to have apostles lay hands on them to receive it. Compare 1 Corinthians 12:28-30.

8:17-19 – The Holy Spirit was given by the laying on of apostles' hands. Simon then tried to buy this power.

This surely means that miraculous powers from the Spirit were bestowed on other disciples by the laying on of apostles' hands. Other similar passages are Acts 19:1-7; Romans 1:8-11; 2 Timothy 1:6. That this is something more than the indwelling of the Spirit is further confirmed by

the fact Simon “saw” that the people received the Holy Spirit. Spiritual gifts could be seen, but the indwelling could not. (Note that the Holy Spirit “falling on them” – verse 16 – is the same as “receiving the Holy Spirit” – verses 15,16 – or the Spirit being “given” to them – verse 18).

The passage absolutely affirms that apostles could bestow miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit on others. But it follows by necessary inference that no one but apostles could do so. Note that the passage expressly says it took apostles to do this work. Philip, who could do miracles (verses 6,7,13), did not give the Samaritans the Holy Spirit. Instead, apostles had to come down from Jerusalem (verse 14) to give the power. If people could give miraculous powers to others simply because they themselves had them, then Philip would have passed the power on, and there would have been no need for the apostles to come.

Furthermore, Simon offered to buy the power of laying on of hands when he saw the Holy Spirit was given by the laying on of apostles’ hands. If everyone who had miraculous powers could pass them on to others, there would be no point in Simon’s offer and no advantage in it. All he would have to do would be to receive miraculous powers himself, then he could automatically give the powers to others. But this would give him no advantage since all the other saved Samaritans could do likewise. And if people could receive spiritual gifts by means other than through apostles, why did Simon ask Peter about it? Why not ask Philip whom he would have known longer and better?

Peter told Simon he had no part in the matter, showing the power was limited to just certain people. Clearly there was something special the apostles could do that the other Samaritans could not do, even after they received the Holy Spirit.

The conclusion is that, if people could get miraculous powers only through apostles, and if there are no apostles today (compare 1:21,22), then there is no way people today can obtain the miraculous powers. This is another proof that the miracles ceased around the time when the apostles and other inspired men (on whom the apostles had laid hands) had completed their work of writing the inspired word (compare 1 Corinthians 13).

Miracles were needed in the infancy of the church when the word had not been written completely. This is doubtless the reason the apostles made sure Samaria received the power. Philip was soon to leave, but people did not have the written word to guide them. So the apostles made sure inspired, gifted people were present in that church.

The purposes of miraculous powers were to reveal and confirm the word (see notes on Acts 1:3-8). As soon as the message had been completely revealed, confirmed, and recorded in the Bible, the gifts were no longer needed. So they ceased.

The apostles had received miraculous gifts, and they could pass the gifts on to others. But those who received the gifts from the apostles

could **not**, in turn, pass them on to others. It follows that those gifts ceased with the death of the apostles and those on whom they had laid hands. It also follows that there can be no true successors of the apostles today, since no one can have or give miraculous gifts as they did. This disproves all who claim to have the office of apostles, the powers of apostles, or succession to their office.

Simon had been accustomed to being in the public eye for having great powers. It seems that he wanted something special that other people did not have, and that he thought money could buy this power. Exactly what his motives were are not stated. But in any case, it was not God's will for him to have the power, and it was surely not for sale.

Note that many so-called "miracle healers" of today jump at the chance to make money off the power they claim to have. They will take contributions from desperate and destitute people. They will offer courses for large fees, promising to teach people how to obtain these powers, etc. Had Peter been like these modern preachers, and had such been a legitimate use of the powers, this would have been an excellent opportunity for Peter to get rich. But Peter instead refused.

For further discussion of miraculous gifts for today, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

8:20,21 – Peter rebuked Simon for his sin, saying his money would perish with him because his heart was not right.

Note that God is not just concerned with outward actions of disobedience, but also with improper thoughts and intents. Simon's sin involved an improper attitude of heart in the sight of God.

Here is an undeniable example that a child of God can so sin as to be lost eternally. Simon had become saved. Some attempt to deny this in order to defend their belief in "once saved, always saved," but the account unquestionably affirms Simon's conversion (see notes on verse 13). He had obeyed Mark 16:16 just as the other Samaritans had. If they were saved, he was saved. If he was not saved, neither were they.

Yet after being saved, he so sinned that he was doomed to perish (verse 20), his heart was not right before God (verse 21), he was guilty of wickedness and needed forgiveness (verse 22), he was in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity (verse 23). Many other passages also show it is possible for a child of God to so sin as to be lost (Galatians 5:4; 1 Corinthians 9:25-27; 10:1-12; James 5:19,20).

For further discussion of once saved, always saved, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

8:22,23 – Peter told Simon to repent and pray.

Here is what a child of God who sins must do to be forgiven. Note that Simon was not told to be baptized again. Baptism is necessary for

forgiveness of sins of one who is not a child of God (see on 2:38). But after one becomes a Christian, if he sins again, he must repent of the sin and **pray** for forgiveness. See also 1 John 1:8-10; Matthew 6:12; Luke 18:13,14.

Peter's statement does show that there is hope for the child of God who sins. We all do sin at times (1 John 1:8,10). It is possible for a child of God to be lost, but it is not necessary. God has provided everything we need to remain faithful and receive eternal life (compare 1 Corinthians 10:13; Ephesians 6:1-18). Above all, He has provided the means of forgiveness for sins through the blood of Jesus. There is hope for the erring child of God, but that hope requires us to truly repent and turn away from sin with true commitment to faithful living.

Note that the fact Peter told Simon to repent and pray shows that Peter recognized Simon did **not** need to be baptized again. If Simon had never been Scripturally converted, he would have needed to be baptized (compare 19:1-6). Peter's instruction here shows that Simon was an erring child of God, and hence his conversion had been valid.

Why did Peter say, "if **perhaps** the thought **may** be forgiven"? The point is not to say that, if the conditions are met, God still may choose not to forgive. God is faithful to His promises and will forgive if we meet the conditions (1 John 1:9). The point is to emphasize that Simon must meet the conditions. Peter did not know whether he would or would not meet them. The promise is conditional ("if perhaps") only on whether or not the sinner was willing to repent and pray.

8:24 – Simon then asked for prayer on his behalf.

Simon also desired Peter to pray for him. Such is often desired and needed when we sin (James 5:16). If we have sinned against others, we must tell them of our repentance (Luke 17:3,4; Matthew 5:23,24). If others know of our sin, they must rebuke us, so we ought to tell them when we repent so they know this is no longer needed. It is especially good under such circumstances to ask others to pray for us.

Many have speculated endlessly about Simon's subsequent history. But since the Bible tells us nothing more about him, all such speculation is meaningless and worthless. Had God wanted us to know more, we would have been told more in the Scriptures that provide to all good works (2 Timothy 3:16,17). It is especially sad that much speculation maligns Simon's character when we have no real evidence that he did not repent.

8:25 – The apostles returned to Jerusalem, teaching as they went.

Having given their testimony as apostles and preached in Samaria, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel on the way. The gospel was thus spread to many other Samaritan villages.

Peter had enough concern for these lost souls that he was willing to preach to Samaritans, as Jesus and Philip had done. However, he had difficulties later because of his Jewish prejudice. When the gospel needed to be preached to Gentiles, he needed special revelation to convince him to do it (Acts 10,11; compare Acts 15). Still later in Antioch, he refused to eat with Gentiles and had to be rebuked (Galatians 2:11-14).

The early church overcame its racial prejudices gradually. The modern church likewise needs to overcome any remnants of racial prejudice found among us.

The Conversion of the Ethiopian Treasurer – 8:26-40

8:26 – An angel called Philip to go to the road to Gaza.

An angel told Philip to leave Samaria and go to a road from Jerusalem to Gaza, a desert area. (See *map*.) In Samaria, Philip had taught multitudes (8:6). We might think that, with such success, he should stay there. But God called him to teach a single man in a deserted region. He went readily and taught just as zealously as he had in Samaria.

Other faithful teachers did the same. Jesus taught multitudes, but also taught Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, Nathanael, etc. Paul preached publicly and from house to house (Acts 20:20).

Some modern preachers will preach to assemblies, but make little or no effort to teach individuals. Some members think, if they cannot preach publicly, they have no work to do in teaching. But we can all learn to teach individuals. When we do, God views our work as just as useful as that of those who address large crowds.

“Desert” does not mean a place with no water, as the modern word often means. Some argue, despite the evidence of context, that Philip must have sprinkled water on the eunuch because a waterless desert would not have enough water to immerse him. But even waterless deserts have occasional oases, so there are no grounds to contradict what the context clearly states, even if the word did mean an arid desert.

However, “desert” here means simply that the region was deserted by people. Few people lived there. It was “a solitude, an uninhabited place, in contrast to a town or village ... It does not always denote a barren region, void of vegetation” (Vine says this is the “same meaning” as the word used here). The word is often translated “wilderness.” It had nothing to do with being waterless. (See Luke 5:16; 8:29; Matthew 14:13,15; 24:26; John 6:31; Mark 1:35.) In fact, this area today is known to have many streams and pools, and is a very fertile region (see Coffman and McGarvey). Note that Stringer gives evidence that the statement

may simply mean that the city of Gaza (not the area the road passed through) was deserted or uninhabited, having been destroyed many years earlier.

8:27,28 – Philip met the treasurer of the queen of Ethiopia.

Surely this man must have been important to God, for he called Philip to leave Samaria and brought him all the way to the deserted area to teach this one individual. He was a eunuch from Ethiopia, treasurer of Candace, queen of Ethiopia, obviously an important man with great authority. Eunuchs were frequently used in such positions of authority, especially serving queens. Having lost their masculine capacity, they were less subject to betray their trust for personal pleasure.

Note that here was a sincere religious man who was lost.

Some people believe that God will accept all sincere religious people, so we should not tell such people that they need to repent to be saved. But this man was a sincere religious man, yet Philip taught him how to be saved.

He had come to Jerusalem from Ethiopia to worship, and was returning. He was clearly zealous in the Jewish faith. This was a journey of hundreds of miles traveling by chariot – an extremely difficult means of transportation.

He was reading Isaiah as he rode along. When Philip approached, he wanted to talk to Philip about the Scripture. Clearly he was a religious man. Yet he did not know about Jesus so could not believe in Him. So, he was lost, though religious (John 8:24; Mark 16:16; Acts 4:12; John 14:6).

The Bible mentions other lost sincere religious people.

Examples are Cornelius, who was devout and prayed regularly (Acts 10:1-4,22), yet he needed to hear words whereby he could be saved (11:14).

Saul was a devout Jew, zealous and having a good conscious. Yet he persecuted Christians and later realized he was the chief of sinners (Acts 23:1; 26:1-11; Galatians 1:13,14; 1 Timothy 1:12-15). Many Jews were zealous for God, but lacked knowledge and needed to be saved (Romans 10:1-3; compare Matthew 7:21-23). So sincere, devout religious people can surely be lost.

Note the further evidence that Philip was not limited by racial prejudice.

He had already preached in Samaria, where many Jews would not even go. But this Ethiopian man may have been a black man – most Ethiopians were. He may have been a Jew who simply lived in Ethiopia, but he may have been a native Ethiopian who was a Jewish proselyte. If he were a black man, Philip would surely have taught him with the same zeal he did the Samaritans.

Some church members today do not want to teach people of other races, and some do not want to worship with them. They do not imitate Philip's example (he surely was willing to worship with the people he converted!). Such people should be ashamed of their selfish prejudices. God wants all men to be saved. Can we want less?

This man was no doubt also important because, having learned the truth, he could take it back with him to Ethiopia. After his conversion, he went rejoicing on his way (verse 39). We are told nothing more of him, but surely he went back and told people of the salvation he had found in Christ.

8:29 – The Spirit directed Philip to overtake the chariot.

Many people believe that the Holy Spirit directly guides sinners to salvation or assures them they have been saved. This example illustrates that God's inspiration directly guided inspired teachers, but sinners learned the gospel only through inspired human teachers. Consider examples.

An angel told Philip to go where the treasurer was (verse 26), then the Spirit told Philip to meet the treasurer (verse 29). Why didn't the angel or the Spirit just directly tell the treasurer how to be saved?

Similar examples are Acts 9:1-19; 10:1-11:18. Jesus appeared to Saul, but said to go into the city to be told what to do to be saved. An angel told Cornelius to send for Peter who could tell him words whereby he could be saved (11:13,14). The Spirit then told Peter to go with the men Cornelius sent (10:9-22; 11:1-12). Why didn't Jesus or the angel just tell the sinner what to do to be saved?

Romans 10:14 – People can no more hear without a preacher than they can believe without hearing (compare 10:17). God committed to men the ministry of reconciliation; He put the treasure in earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 5:18; 4:7).

The Bible was recorded by the agency of **men**. When we study the Bible, we are being taught by the agency of inspired **men**, just as people in the first century who listened to their inspired oral teachings.

People today are mistaken when they think the Spirit directly told them how to be saved or that they were saved. God never did such, not even in the age when the Spirit did speak directly to people. God has always used **human agents** in teaching sinners how to be saved. The **teacher** got the message directly, but the sinner got it through the inspired man.

8:30,31 – The treasurer sought help in understanding the passage from Isaiah he had been reading.

Note the wisdom of Philip's teaching approach. He began where the student was. He saw he was interested in the word of God, and he knew he could teach the man the truth from God's word. So he began with a

topic mutually accepted as true by both the teacher and the student. It was common ground.

On the other hand, he needed to know where the man was in his understanding. So he asked. We sometimes make the mistake of discussing material that is so advanced the student does not have sufficient background knowledge to understand or accept the material. Or we discuss what is so well known that the student does not need it. We must find out where he is so we can start at the point of his need, as Philip did.

Philip also began with a question, a very good way to start. It brings the person into the conversation, and lets us know where he is. In this case, it also helped the treasurer face up to the fact that he needed help. Questions were always important in Jesus' teaching, and using them effectively is a skill all teachers need.

Then note the humility and open mind of the treasurer. This was an important man in the eyes of society. He had great authority, responsible for all the treasure of the queen of Ethiopia (8:27). Often people in important places aren't receptive to truth. They think their views are as good as any others, so they reject truth (1 Corinthians 1:18-25; Proverbs 3:5,6). They may not be willing to admit they have been wrong and need to change and be forgiven.

Many Jewish leaders rejected the message and even killed Stephen for preaching it (Acts 7). This man accepted truth because he had an open mind.

Acts 17:11 – The Bereans, like the treasurer, received the word with a ready mind (compare Matthew 5:6).

Matthew 13:13-15 – Jewish leaders, on the other hand, rejected Jesus' teaching because they closed their eyes and ears to it (compare Proverbs 18:13; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12).

People who are interested in the Bible, often yet misunderstand it. They may need help from others who have studied longer or who at least know the answer to their particular question. We should be willing to help one another as Philip did here.

However, in this case the treasurer needed help in a different way than we do. He was studying a Scripture which was a prophecy, but he was unacquainted with the event that fulfilled it. Prophecy is often difficult to understand, especially before it has been fulfilled. This particular passage is much easier for us now, because we have the New Testament to explain its fulfillment. The treasurer did not have the New Testament, but Philip as an inspired man, could give the answer he needed.

8:32,33 – *Isaiah predicted one who would be like a lamb led to the slaughter, dumb before its shearers.*

The passage the eunuch read was Isaiah 53:7,8. It was a prophecy of the suffering and death of the Messiah. It describes how He humbly submitted to death, like a sheep going to the slaughter or to be sheared. He did not protest, even though His judgment was unfair and unjust (He

was “deprived of justice” – NIV). Because He died, no one can name His descendants or offspring. But the eunuch did not know who it was speaking about.

This verse contradicts all Jewish tradition of the Messiah, and the views of modern premillennialists. They simply did not believe that the Messiah was expected to die. Philip preached the suffering, dying, sacrificed Messiah that Isaiah had predicted.

Jesus, however, did die. He fulfilled this prophecy just as Isaiah gave it. He did not strike out or try to stop those who killed him, despite the fact it was a terrible miscarriage of justice. Yet for our sake, He gave His life.

8:34,35 – In response to the eunuch’s request, Philip preached Jesus to him.

This is the proper subject for all gospel preaching. However, some people do not understand what it means to preach Jesus. Preaching Jesus surely includes telling about His character and what He did (1 Corinthians 15:1-5; Acts 2). It also requires giving evidence that He is who He claimed to be. This is the point of the prophecy. (See also Acts 2,3, etc.)

But many people do not understand that preaching Jesus also requires preaching the **will** or teachings of Jesus. See the notes on subsequent verses that show what more is involved (see also notes above on verse 12).

8:36 – When they came to water, the treasurer wanted to be baptized.

Verse 35 said that Philip preached Jesus to the eunuch. Here we learn that, when Christ is preached, people learn that they must obey Him, including being baptized. In a similar way, in verse 5 he preached Christ in Samaria, but verse 12 shows that this included preaching about the kingdom of God and the name (authority, will) of Jesus, which led people to be baptized.

Preaching Jesus requires us to preach about Jesus’ character and what He did. Some think this is all there is to preaching Christ. They say, “Don’t preach about the church or obedience.” Yet Philip’s preaching shows us that preaching Jesus **includes** telling people what Jesus **taught**, whether personally or through His inspired apostles. Preaching Jesus includes preaching the will of Jesus. This includes His will about what we must do to be saved, about the church, about moral living, etc. Anytime we preach the will of Jesus, we are preaching Jesus (compare 1 Corinthians 2:1,2 to Acts 18:8,13).

The eunuch was urgent about being baptized: “What doth hinder me...” He confessed his Lord, and was immediately baptized. Other Bible examples show the same urgency. People were baptized “the same day”

(Acts 2:41); “immediately” (Acts 9:18); “the same hour of the night...immediately” (after midnight – Acts 16:25,33). They were told not to wait (Acts 22:16).

Modern denominations usually tell people they should wait till a baptismal service some days or weeks in the future. Why don't they have the same urgency as in these Bible examples? Because they don't understand the real purpose of baptism.

Baptism is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), to be saved (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21), to have sins washed away (Acts 22:16), to come into Christ and into His death (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27). Clearly people are still lost in sin till they are baptized. That is why baptism is so urgent in Bible examples. But modern denominations tell people they are saved before and without baptism, so they are not urgent about getting it done. This is simply another way denominational baptism does not fit the Bible pattern.

8:37 – When Philip said he must believe, the treasurer confessed Jesus Christ.

This verse shows that, before a person can be baptized, he must believe in Jesus and must be willing to say that he believes, so the person who baptizes him knows he believes. This harmonizes with other passages that show baptism is only for people who have faith and who confess that faith (Mark 16:15,16; Galatians 3:26,27; Acts 8:12; Romans 10:9,10). This demonstrates that baptism is not for babies, since they can neither believe nor confess.

This also demonstrates that confession is a condition one must meet before he can be baptized. One cannot be Scripturally baptized without informing the one who baptizes him that he has accepted the truths of the gospel, and all other people present ought also to know this (Romans 10:9,10; 1 Timothy 6:12,13).

Confession is not just an acceptance of facts about Jesus, but a statement of commitment. One is saying that he accepts Jesus to be all that the Bible claims Him to be, and that one is willing to submit to His plan and obey Him.

What about the fact that this passage is not found in some ancient manuscripts and therefore is not in some modern translations? Even those scholars who question its authenticity, all admit its teachings are in harmony with the gospel. We have proved clearly that this is the case.

God has promised to preserve His truth in the Scriptures for all ages (1 Peter 1:22ff; etc. – see our online study on the preservation of the Bible). He intended the Bible to be for the common people. For hundreds of years until the late 1800's, all Bibles common to English-speaking people included this verse. Still today most of them include it, either in the text or in a footnote. Would it harmonize with God's plan to allow a verse to be included if it taught error, misleading all these people for all

these years? [This may not prove the verse is authentic, but it proves it teaches truth.

8:38,39 – Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, he baptized him, and they came up out of the water.

The case of the eunuch shows us clearly what the action of baptism involves. It is neither a sprinkling nor a pouring but a complete immersion. Note that they came to the water (verse 36). This was not a jug of water that the eunuch happened to have with him, as some claim.

Philip and the eunuch both went down into the water and he baptized him and they came up out of the water. This is the same as was done in Jesus' baptism (Mark 1:9,10). This fits immersion, but not sprinkling or pouring.

Some people argue that you could go down into the water, sprinkle or pour some on the person's head, and then come up out of the water. But this is not what denominations do when they sprinkle or pour, so why argue that they could do it? The fact is that they don't do it, so they don't do what the Bible teaches should be done. And the reason they don't is that it does not make sense to do that if all you plan to do is to sprinkle or pour. Only immersion fits the pattern here.

Furthermore, baptism requires a burial and a resurrection (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12). The body must be washed in water (Hebrews 10:22). The original Greek word itself means to immerse or dip, as can be seen in the derivation of the word in even English dictionaries.

For further discussion of sprinkling or pouring for baptism, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

The treasurer went on his way rejoicing. There is great joy in knowing one has committed his life to serving God, and has been forgiven of sin through Christ. Do you have this joy? If not, will you imitate his example?

8:40 – Philip continued his work of preaching.

Verse 39 said the Spirit caught away Philip. This is not clear as to how it was done, but apparently in some miraculous way the Spirit took Philip elsewhere. His work with the eunuch was done, so he moved on.

He was next found preaching at Azotus, preaching from there to Caesarea. [See *map*.] This is the last we hear of him until Acts 21:8 where he was still at Caesarea.

Acts 9

The Conversion of Saul – 9:1-30

See also Acts 22:3-16; 26:1-17 where Saul later retells the story of his conversion.

9:1-9 - Jesus' Appearance to Saul

9:1,2 – Saul obtained authority from the high priest to arrest Christians in Damascus.

Saul was continuing his persecutions of Christians (see 8:1,3; 22:4,5; 26:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:13). Saul was a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, brought up under the teaching of Gamaliel, and a member of the sect of the Pharisees (Philippians 3:4,5; 2 Timothy 1:3; Acts 22:3). As such, he was extremely zealous for his religion, for the law, and for Jewish tradition. He had also been trained in the trade of tent making.

His zeal led him to oppose the gospel of Christ so diligently that he had created such havoc in Jerusalem that the Christians there had fled the city (8:1-3). He elsewhere stated that many of the Christians he persecuted had been imprisoned, and some like Stephen had been killed with his approval (7:58; 22:19,20; 26:10,11). But those who were scattered, instead of forsaking their faith, as Saul had hoped, simply spread the message everywhere they went (8:4).

Saul, in turn, rather than giving up his persecutions, determined to follow the Christians and persecute them elsewhere. In the present record, he went to the high priest to get letters of authority to go to Damascus to capture and bring to Jerusalem any Christians he found there. Damascus is located about 150 miles northeast of Jerusalem. It had been in Old Testament days the capital city of Syria. [See *map* for Damascus.]

The gospel had just recently gone to Samaria, so it could not have been long in Damascus. Yet there were enough Christians Saul wanted to go there and capture them. Perhaps this had been a major gathering place for many of those who had escaped from Jerusalem. Note Saul's zeal for his beliefs. This was a long journey for such a purpose.

The gospel way of salvation and living is here called simply "the Way." There is only one way to salvation, and that comes by Christ and His gospel (Matthew 7:13,14; John 14:6). Those who follow this way are

said to be “of the Way” (9:2; 19:9,23; 22:4; 24:14,22). We must continue in the Way to receive eternal life. Would we remain faithful if we faced persecution such as the Christians here did?

Synagogues were local assemblies or groups of Jews who met, worshiped, studied the law, and accomplished their work. Like local congregations of Christians, these Jewish synagogues were found in many communities. Saul’s letter from the high priest was to these synagogues. Apparently he wanted their cooperation in his work. Later, after his conversion, Saul always went first to the synagogue in any city to find people to teach.

9:3,4 – Jesus appeared to Saul in a light from heaven.

As Saul drew near to Damascus on his journey, a light from heaven suddenly shone around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice asking why Saul was persecuting Him. 26:14 adds that those who were with Saul fell to the earth also, and that the voice spoke in the Hebrew tongue. Further, 22:6 adds that this occurred about noon, yet the light that shone was brighter than the midday sun (26:13).

These details show that the event could simply never have been faked. It occurred on a public road in the open in the middle of the day, and yet the light that appeared was brighter than the sun. How could anyone in any day, let alone that day, have faked such an appearance?

Note that Jesus accused Saul of having persecuted Him. Opposing and persecuting the people of Jesus is the same as persecuting Jesus Himself. In other places He taught that helping and encouraging His people is the same as doing that for Him (Matthew 25:31-46; 10:40-42). Jesus identifies with His people such that, in His view, the treatment we give His people is the treatment we give Him.

9:5 – In response to Saul’s inquiry, Jesus identified Himself as the speaker.

Saul naturally wondered who was speaking to him in such an amazing manner. Though he did not know who it was, yet he recognized that it must be someone important and powerful to appear in such an awe-inspiring manner, so he addressed Him as “Lord.”

Jesus then identified Himself, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” (22:8 adds “Jesus of Nazareth”; compare 26:15.) Consider the impact this must have had on Saul, for he believed Jesus was an impostor who was **dead**. He surely had rejected the claims of the resurrection. Yet here was this One, whom he was opposing and considered to be dead, speaking to him personally. He could no longer deny the resurrection for he had become a personal witness that Jesus was alive.

In addition, Jesus said, “It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” (This is absent in the ASV here, but is found in 26:14.) A “goad” is a pointed stick used to prod oxen to move (like using spurs on a horse).

“Kick against the goads” refers to a stubborn attitude like an ox, so determined to not obey his master, that he would actually kick out at the goad, thereby hurting himself more severely.

By this figure, Jesus shows that Saul had in the past received reasons to repent and serve Jesus, but he had refused to heed. What were some of these “goads”? The Old Testament testified of Jesus (26:22; etc.). Saul had no doubt heard of the miracles done by Jesus and His apostles. And he had been present at Stephen’s death and heard his message.

Yet Saul had not only refused to obey, he had in fact actively opposed the truth to the point of persecuting believers. In this, he was hurting himself by rebelling against that which was encouraging him to do right. Many people are the same today. Christ’s message goads them to obedience, but does not force them. They often refuse to obey, and many actively oppose His work.

This proves conclusively that people have the power of free will to choose whether or not to serve God. God gives them evidence, instruction, and reasons to obey. But He does not compel. Each person, like Saul, is completely able to resist or comply.

9:6 – Jesus told him to go into the city to learn what was expected of him.

Saul asked Jesus what He wanted him to do.

(Again, this is missing in ASV, but is present in 22:10.) No doubt Saul’s first use of “Lord” was a term of respect for anyone powerful. But here it amounted to a confession of Jesus, since Saul was still calling him “Lord” after learning who He is. The One whom he had previously rejected and opposed, he was now calling “Lord” and asking what He wanted done. Nothing but a profound change of attitude would have produced this result.

Saul realized he must have been terribly wrong and there had to be something to do to make it right. This explains why he was “trembling and astonished.” Who would not tremble and be astonished in Saul’s place? This also shows that he realized the great significance of what was happening.

Jesus said Saul should go into the city where he would be told what he “must do.”

These were the things “appointed” for him to do – 22:10. This leads to several important lessons.

(1) **Obedience is required to receive forgiveness of sins.** Modern “faith-only” preachers say, “There is nothing anyone can **do** to be saved. You are saved by what Jesus did. All you need is faith.” But Jesus Himself told Saul there were things he “**must do.**” Many other Scriptures show that obedience is essential for an alien sinner to be for-

given: Matthew 7:21-27; 22:36-39; John 14:15,21-24; Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:6-10; 6:17,18; Hebrews 5:9; 10:39; 11:8,30; Galatians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9; James 2:14-26; 1 Peter 1:22,23; 1 John 5:3; 2:3-6.

Further, Saul had already done all that most preachers say is necessary. He evidently had come to believe on Jesus and was willing to serve Him. In verse 11 we are even told that he spent the following three days praying (though no one told him to do so). Nevertheless, he had not yet been told what he must do. It follows that something else was required of him and is required of us.

In Acts 22:16 we learn what he was told he “must do.” He was told to be baptized and wash away his sins. Sins are not forgiven till one is baptized (Acts 2:38; Mark. 16:16; Galatians 3:26,27; Romans 6:3,4; 1 Peter 3:21). Even if one already believes that Jesus is the Christ, this is what he “must do” to be forgiven. (See notes on Acts 2:38.)

(2) Saul had to be told by a human preacher what he must do to be saved. Why didn't Jesus just tell him? Because that is not His plan. Throughout the gospel, people learned how to be saved by being instructed by inspired men, either in spoken form or written form.

Neither the Holy Spirit, angels, nor Jesus Himself (after He ascended to heaven) ever told a lost sinner how to be saved. Even in those cases in which a supernatural being appeared to the sinner, still the information about how to be saved had to come from a human agent (compare Acts 10; 11:14; 2 Corinthians 4:7; 5:18-20; Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16; Romans 10:14,17; 1:16; see notes on Acts 8:29). Furthermore, a man would be needed to baptize the sinner.

Why then did Jesus appear to Saul at all?

This was still the age of miracles, and doubtless this appearance convinced Saul he needed to repent and believe in Jesus. But the main purpose is stated in Acts 26:16; 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:1-8 (compare Acts 1:21,22,24; 22:14,15). Jesus said He appeared to Saul to appoint him a minister and a **witness** of the things wherein he had seen Jesus. As a result Saul would go to Gentiles to turn them from Satan to God so they might receive remission of sins (verse 18). Jesus appeared to Saul to make him an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ. This was necessary to qualify him to be an apostle and to appoint him to the work. He was one “born out of due time.”

This also shows us that this appearance of Jesus was a personal appearance, not just a dream or hallucination. It was clear and convincing enough to persuade this strong opponent to repent and completely change to become one of the strongest defenders of the faith. What an incredible testimony Saul then had that Jesus was really raised from the dead! How do those today who deny the resurrection respond to such evidence? When Saul said this is what converted him, and then devoted his life to serving Jesus despite horrible persecutions, what else could this be but a genuine appearance of Jesus?

There is conclusive evidence Saul did truly see Jesus. We have his own testimony, but in addition the men who were with him witnessed the event, though they did not personally see Jesus (9:7,8; compare chapter 22,26). Ananias also had a vision in which God told Him Jesus had appeared to Saul (9:17). The blindness of Saul testified to the event, since it began at Jesus' appearance and did not end till Ananias removed it, just as Jesus had said would happen (9:8,9,12,17,18). Barnabas later testified to the apostles that Saul saw Jesus (9:27), so the event was clearly known to others. In addition, of course, Luke by inspiration here records it as a fact. There can be no doubt that Saul did receive this event that qualified him as an apostle.

9:7,8 – Saul, struck blind, was led into Damascus.

This tells us there were other men traveling with Saul, though we do not know how many or who they were. We are told they heard a voice but saw no one. This indicates that the appearance had a special purpose for Saul which did not pertain to the others. That purpose, as we have observed, was to qualify him to be an eyewitness that Jesus had been raised. To accomplish this, he had to see Jesus. There was no reason for the others to see Him.

The verse says the men “heard” (ακουω) the “voice” (φωνη). In 22:9 the same Greek words are used but we are told they heard **not** the voice. NASB translates 9:7 as “hearing the voice” (ftnt. “or sound”); on 22:9 it has “did not understand the voice” (ftnt. “or hear (with comprehension)”).

Vine comments:

“...in Acts 9:7 ... the noun ‘voice’ is in the partitive genitive case [i.e., hearing (something) of], whereas in 22:9, the construction is with the accusative. This removes the idea of any contradiction. The former indicates a hearing of the sound, the latter indicates the meaning or message of the voice (this they did not hear). ‘The former denotes the sensational perception, the latter (the accusative case) the thing perceived’ (Cramer)” – Vine on “hear.”

When Saul arose (having fallen to the earth – verse 4) and opened his eyes, he saw no one. The men with him, evidently were not blinded at all, for they led him to Damascus. Here again was a distinction between Saul and the other men. Acts 22:11 says he “could not see for the glory of that light.” The purpose of the blindness was a further sign which served to identify both to Saul and to Ananias that Saul had truly seen Jesus. It also serves as a sign to Saul that Ananias was the one to tell him what he must do.

Likewise, Acts 26:14 says they had all fallen to the ground but here 9:7 says the men with Saul stood speechless. Doubtless again, both happened. Most likely they fell at first as Saul had done (verse 4) as a result of shock from seeing the light. They heard the sound and did not understand it but observed Saul speaking to someone. This would lead them

to realize there was no danger, and the speaker was evidently concerned with Saul not with them. So they would have eventually stood up, standing speechless (verse 7). Nevertheless, they would have witnessed enough to know that some supernatural event occurred and could doubtless confirm the occurrence of the event, though they did not see Jesus Himself.

9:9 – Saul remained blind for three days without food or drink.

Saul's blindness continued for 3 days, during which time Saul also fasted, refusing to eat or drink. Verse 11 adds that he was praying. This indicates sincere faith and repentance. He was evidently very concerned about his past life. He was convicted that Jesus was now alive and that he ought to be serving Jesus, yet he knew he had been persecuting Jesus' people. And as yet he had no solution for his problem, for he had not yet received the message that Jesus had promised would tell him what he must do.

Imagine how he felt, knowing that he had been responsible for the imprisonment and death of Christians, and now having learned that he was wrong and they were right all along. Doubtless he was overwhelmed with godly sorrow such as is required for true repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10). Fasting was a frequent form of expressing repentance. Note, however, that Saul had not been told by anyone to fast or to pray. Nevertheless it does indicate repentance.

Note at this point that Saul had done everything that most denominational preachers say a sinner must do to be forgiven and saved from sin. He evidently believed, had repented, and had been praying and even fasting for three days. Yet he was totally miserable. If he was saved, he surely did not know it. Nor had he been told what he must do. Many preachers use the teaching of Paul after his conversion in the books of Romans, etc., to try to prove that baptism is not necessary to salvation but one is saved by faith only. Yet Paul's own conversion proves the opposite. He had to be baptized to wash away his sins (22:16); then he felt relief from his grief (9:18,19).

9:10-19 - The Visit of Ananias

9:10-12 – The Lord told Ananias to go give back Saul's sight.

The Lord then appeared in a vision to a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. 22:12 adds that he was a devout man according to the law, well reported of by the Jews there. This event is the only record we have of this man. Yet evidently he had miraculous powers and was a disciple trusted by the Lord. Imagine the great joy he eventually must have felt in knowing he had been the one who taught and baptized the man who became the apostle Paul. The Lord told him to go see Saul, whom he would find at the house of Judas on the street called Straight. Interestingly, there is still today a street in Damascus called Straight.

The Lord said Saul was praying.

Some people tell lost sinners to believe in Jesus and “pray the sinner’s prayer” and they will be saved. They tell you that is all you must do to be saved. But remember that Saul had yet to be told what he must do. No one told him to pray. Yet he prayed after he believed in Jesus. Did this save Him? If so, why did he need to be told what he must do? Acts 22:16 says he was still in his sins till he was baptized, and this is what Ananias went to him to tell him to do.

There is no passage anywhere in the New Testament that instructs an unbaptized sinner to pray for forgiveness of his sins, nor is there any promise that such a person can receive forgiveness by prayer. The Bible says such people must be baptized. The denominational teaching that such people should pray for forgiveness is a human substitution for what God commanded.

God had sent a vision to Saul telling him that a man named Ananias would come and lay hands on him so he might receive his sight.

We are not told whether Jesus said this to Saul when Jesus appeared to him on the road or at some later time. Note that the purpose of laying on hands was to give him sight – nothing about receiving the Holy Spirit in this case. In verse 12, God revealed this information to Ananias.

Note that laying on of hands was sometimes done for reasons other than to give people miraculous powers (as in Acts 8:14ff; 19:1ff). It was customary to lay hands on people for various purposes, including blessing them to do some work (Acts 13:1-4). According to this passage, laying on of hands was also done in the accomplishing of miracles. The action made clear through whom the miracle was being done. This was especially important in this case to identify to Saul that the one who laid hands on him was the one sent by Jesus to tell Saul what he “must do” – i.e., to confirm the message as being what Jesus said he would be told.

The obvious intent was to get the sinner together with the man who could solve his problem. Note again the effort God went to so that Saul might be saved, yet Jesus never took the seemingly simpler way of just telling Saul how to be saved. The message had to come by way of inspired men.

9:13,14 – Ananias expressed concern about Saul’s history of persecution.

Ananias explained to the Lord that he had heard that Saul had persecuted the Christians in Jerusalem and that he had authority to imprison all the Christians in Damascus. The reason for this statement is not directly named, but it should be obvious from the context. Ananias was a Christian. He knew Saul had imprisoned many Christians and led

to the death of some. He knew Saul was in Damascus to likewise persecute the saints there. And now the Lord was telling the victim to go find the persecutor! Imagine how you or I would feel in Ananias' place. It is a great tribute to his faith that he went at all.

The word "saint" is here used for the first time in Luke's record. Clearly it is not used in the way often used by religious people today. Saul harmed the "saints" in Jerusalem by persecuting the church (8:1,3). Saints are simply members of the church or disciples of Christ. There is no implication that they must be dead or have some church organization appoint them as saints so people can pray to them. The word means one who is holy, sanctified, or set apart to the service of the Lord. When a person determines to live his life for God and receives forgiveness of sins by the blood of Jesus, he immediately is set apart by God to His service. He is a saint.

Note also that Jesus had told Saul that the one who came to him would tell him what to do. Nowhere does the record say that the Lord had to tell Ananias what to tell Saul to do. Yet when he got there Ananias knew just what to tell him (22:16). This implies that what Ananias told him was not special instructions just for Saul. It was the same for everyone. It was in the great commission (Mark 16:16), and all Christians had obeyed it, so Ananias knew already what Saul had to do to wash away his sins: arise and be baptized.

9:15,16 – Jesus said Saul was a chosen vessel to bear his name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.

To reassure Ananias that he really should go teach Saul, the Lord informed him that Saul was a chosen vessel to carry His name to Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. A vessel is a container used to hold or carry something. So Saul would be the means the Lord would use to carry the message of the gospel. 26:16-18 adds that he would open the hearts of these people to turn them from darkness of Satan to the light of God that they might be sanctified by remission of sins.

Note that Saul was chosen of Christ to be His special representative. This was true of all apostles (compare the call of the 12 and Acts 1:24). 26:16 says the Lord told Saul He had appeared to him to make him a witness that he had seen Jesus. So Saul's qualifications as an apostle are identified in these accounts of his conversion.

Saul was to preach to Gentiles as well as Israelites, yet at this time no Gentile had been taught the gospel (see chapter 10). This statement is prophetic, for Paul not only did teach kings (rulers), he also taught Jews and Gentiles (compare Acts 22 & 26). But everyone was Jew or Gentile, so Paul had a responsibility to teach all kinds of people.

Yet Saul would also suffer much for the cause of Christ. He had caused great suffering, even as Ananias had mentioned. Ananias was concerned that Saul would cause more suffering for Christians, but God assured Ananias that Saul himself was going to be the one to suffer for

the cause of Christ. All these predictions regarding Saul came true in his work as the apostle Paul, in his missionary journeys, etc. (compare 9:19-30; 2 Corinthians 11:23-32; and the accounts of his travels).

9:17 – Ananias went to Saul to give back his sight.

Having this reassurance, Ananias went to the house and laid hands on Saul (compare verse 12). He called him “Brother Saul.” Some people claim this proves Saul was already a Christian, saved by faith alone before he was baptized. Yet he still had his sins (22:16), so how could he be a Christian? Ananias used the word “brother” as an address to a fellow Jew, not as a Christian.

Ananias identified himself as the one sent by the Lord who had appeared to Saul. Saul was waiting for someone to come to tell him what he must do. How would he identify the person when he came? The person would be named Ananias (verse 12). And he would heal Saul’s blindness (verse 12). So the blindness was a sign that Jesus really had appeared to Saul, and the cure was a sign that the man who cured him was sent from God to tell him what to do. In addition, Ananias knew without asking Saul that Jesus had appeared to him.

Ananias said Jesus had sent him that Saul might receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. As noted in verse 12, the laying on of hands did not always give spiritual gifts, and it gave spiritual gifts only when done by an apostle (see notes on 8:14ff). The Lord said the laying on of hands in this case would restore Saul’s sight. Nothing in the record connects the laying on of hands with giving the Holy Spirit. Note also that, if Ananias gave him the miraculous powers when he laid hands on him here, it would have been before Saul was even a Christian. This could happen in exceptional cases, such as Cornelius (Acts 10,11), but is not likely.

“Filled with the Spirit” does not necessarily mean miraculous powers (see Acts 6:3; Ephesians 5:18). All Christians have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them when they have been baptized (Acts 2:38; 1 Corinthians 6:19,20). It is probable that Ananias here meant “filled with the Holy Spirit” in this sense. He had come to baptize Saul, resulting in his being filled with the Spirit. Note the parallel between verse 17 and verse 18. Verse 17 says Ananias came so Paul could receive his sight and be filled with the Spirit. Verse 18 says he received his sight and was baptized. This would indicate that being filled with the Spirit was the result of being baptized.

But when did Saul receive miraculous powers of the Spirit? Neither this nor any other account tells us definitely. He received the same powers that the other apostles had, including ability to lay hands on people and give them the Holy Spirit (19:1ff). In Galatians 1 he argues at length that the apostles did not give him his message, but he received it by direct revelation from the Lord. It seems most likely to me, therefore, that he received Holy Spirit baptism at some time and place not recorded. So,

when we speak of the “two cases” of Holy Spirit baptism, we have only two **recorded** cases. Paul was “born out of due time” (1 Corinthians 15:8), so the usual rules do not apply to him. In any case, since he was an apostle, whenever he got these miraculous powers, it is still true that apostles were always involved whenever anyone received miraculous powers of the spirit.

9:18 – When his sight had been restored, Saul was baptized.

Something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes and he received sight (22:13). He arose and was baptized, but this account does not tell why. 22:16 says it was because Ananias said, “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” This explains why Saul arose and was baptized – because this is what the Lord had said he would be told that he “must do.”

Saul had believed, repented, prayed, and fasted (see previous verses), yet he was still in sin. Today many preachers tell lost sinners that they should “pray through” for salvation or “pray the sinner’s prayer.” Finding a praying, penitent like Saul, they would say that he was already doing exactly what he needed to do to be saved, and nothing more is needed. They would either urge him to continue on in his prayer, or they would reassure him that he had already done enough and surely Jesus had already saved him.

But remember that Ananias was sent to tell Saul what he must do, and he said no such thing as modern preachers say. Nor would modern preachers dare to say to such a person as Saul the very thing that Ananias said. Ananias said that people like Saul needed to be told, to quit praying (“what are you waiting for”) and get up and be baptized and wash away their sins! Baptism was the only thing that stood between Saul, as a penitent believer, and salvation (compare Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21; Mark 16:16; etc.). Sins are not washed away by water. They are washed away by the blood of Christ, but that happens only when a penitent believer is baptized (Romans 6:3,4).

9:19 – Saul then ended his fast and remained in Damascus with the disciples.

Note that it was after he had been baptized that Saul ate and received strength. Until then he was fasting and praying. If he was saved on the road to Damascus or before baptism, why was he still praying and fasting? As has been said, if he was saved before baptism, he was the most miserable saved man there ever was! Clearly he knew his problem had not been solved till he was baptized. Till then, he had not done what he “must do,” so his sins were not washed away. But as soon as he had been baptized, then he ended his fast and took food. As with the eunuch, the joy of salvation did not come till he had been baptized.

Then he stayed awhile at Damascus with the disciples there. He had come to imprison these very people, but instead he ended up fellowshiping them.

For further discussion of the importance of baptism, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

9:20-25 - Saul's Teaching in Damascus

9:20-22 – Saul convincingly preached Christ to the Jews.

Saul's conversion led to his spreading the gospel of Jesus just as zealously as he had previously opposed it. He preached the gospel in the synagogues (see Acts 6:9), proving that Jesus was the Christ.

This became the approach he used in nearly every city which he later visited. He would first enter the synagogue to preach. The Jews had been God's people. They knew the law which God gave to lead them to Christ (Galatians 3:23ff). They expected the Messiah and knew He was to be a descendant of David. Often they would allow Saul (later called Paul) to preach, though they invariably eventually threw him out.

In any case, Paul loved his national people (Romans 10:1ff). Since they met on the seventh-day Sabbath, he had in their synagogues a ready-made audience. This is no proof that Saul kept the Sabbath after his conversion. He himself taught the disciples to remember the Lord's death each first day of the week (compare Acts 20:7), and plainly stated that the Sabbath had been nailed to the cross with the law so it should not be bound (Colossians 2:14,16; compare Hebrews 7,8,9,10; 2 Corinthians 3:7ff; Ephesians 2:12ff; Romans 7:1-7; Galatians 3:24ff).

As would be expected, the people were amazed at him. They knew he had come to Damascus to persecute Christians and now he was suddenly preaching the very message he had come to oppose. This was extremely hard for the Jews to understand, but for us today it is a powerful testimony for the truth of the gospel. Paul's claim was that the change occurred because he actually saw Jesus. If this claim is true, then Jesus really was raised from the dead (compare 1 Corinthians 15:1-8ff). What other explanation would cause him to give up all the advantages and influence he had as a Jew and become part of a persecuted minority? His choice gave him persecution and death. How do you explain it if you don't believe in Jesus or the resurrection?

Saul did not waver in his message. He increased in strength completely refuting the Jews in Damascus proving Jesus was the Christ. Note that the fact Jesus is Christ is something that can be **proved**. It is not just accepted by "blind faith" without proof. God knew proof would be needed to convince honest people, so He provided the evidence in the Bible (20:30,31).

Galatians 1 adds that, at some point in this history, Saul spent some time in Arabia. Exactly how this fits chronologically is not made clear.

9:23-25 – Saul escaped a plot against his life by being let down over the city wall in a basket.

Jesus had promised that, just as Saul had himself persecuted the church before his conversion, now he himself would suffer greatly for Christ after his conversion (9:16). This persecution began immediately and followed him all his life. His conversion was a powerful witness for the gospel; his preaching was persuasive. If the Jews would kill Stephen, they would surely not tolerate Saul's success. The opposition this man endured is incredible. Do we have such faith to endure as he had?

The Jews decided to kill him (verse 23). Saul heard of the plot, but they attempted to prevent his escape by watching the city gates day and night (verse 24). Paul later said that Aretas the king was even involved in this plot (2 Corinthians 11:32f). He finally escaped by being lowered through the wall in a basket by night. Cities in those days were generally walled as protection against invading armies. Houses were sometimes built on the wall (as with Rahab in Jericho in Joshua's day). Escape over the wall or through a window in the wall would be possible from such a house, and this is evidently the means the disciples devised for saving Saul. Interestingly, visitors to Damascus even today say that there are still houses built against city walls.

9:26-31 - Saul's Teaching in Jerusalem

9:26-28 – When disciples in Jerusalem feared Saul, Barnabas told them of Saul's conversion.

Saul then went to Jerusalem where he tried to associate with the disciples there. But, like Ananias, they had heard of Saul and were afraid. They knew of his past persecutions and were not convinced he had been converted. Probably they thought he was faking a conversion to get inside information about the members, so he could betray them.

Barnabas, however, somehow knew of Saul's experiences, so he brought Saul to the apostles and told them of Jesus' appearance to Saul and how Saul had preached in Damascus. This apparently convinced the disciples, so Saul associated with them "coming in and going out" and teaching in the area of Jerusalem. Note that Saul worked with the church actively in their teaching.

We were introduced to Barnabas in 4:36. This began a long and close association between Barnabas and Saul. Note the forgiving nature of Barnabas and of all the Christians. It would be no light thing to accept someone who had done so much harm as Saul. No doubt he had been responsible for the imprisonment and even the deaths of saints in the church and perhaps even relatives of the Christians in Jerusalem. Yet they were willing to accept him after they were sure he was truly converted.

Important lessons we should learn about Christians being identified with a local church

(1) ***Because Christians have joint or group responsibilities to fulfill, we should always seek out other Christians in the locality where we live to work and worship with.*** Those who so join together constitute a local church, organized and working according to the Bible pattern. These joint works include assembling to worship God, edifying one another, spreading the gospel, and caring for needy members, as the church in Jerusalem had already been doing. Every member is expected by God to be identified with a local church. Only in this way are they subject to the guidance and protection of the elders of a local church (Hebrews 13:17). When one has committed himself to a local church, then like Saul, he should work with zeal and commitment in the work.

(2) ***The church was not willing to accept Saul till they knew he had been truly converted.*** This attitude is nowhere rebuked as being wrong; in fact, the implication is that the apostles consented and maintained that view until evidence was given that the individual was a true disciple (verse 27). This shows that the church has the right to refuse to receive one who seeks to be considered a member, when there is adequate reason to believe he is not a true disciple.

(3) ***Upon finding evidence that Saul was a true disciple, they accepted him as a member despite his evil, harmful past.*** This shows that we have no right to reject someone from membership simply on grounds of personal preference. If a person's beliefs and practice harmonize with Scripture (such that, for example, if they were already members we would not withdraw from them), then if they request to be accepted as members, we must receive them. We can (and should) reject them only if there is evidence they were not converted or are not living faithfully.

(4) ***Note that, to determine whether or not a person is a faithful Christian, the person may be questioned himself, but it is also proper to call character witnesses.*** These witnesses may be in other congregations, so churches sometimes communicated with one another about members who moved from one place to another (Acts 18:27; 2 Corinthians 3:1; Romans 16:1,2). So, it is Scriptural for churches to investigate the past of members who seek to be identified with the local church. This helps overcome the problems caused by members who sin in one congregation and then run elsewhere to avoid the consequences of their sins. It also helps the church and especially the elders to fulfill the responsibility to protect the members from false teachers who seek to come in, take over, and lead people astray (1 John 4:1; Hebrews 13:17; Acts 20:28-30; etc.)

(5) ***There is no evidence of a trial period being set up so the person could be observed for some probationary period***

to see how he acts after he makes the request to be part of the group. The decision was made based on investigating his *past* life.

Note that this does not justify the practice of some denominations that vote on a person's "experience" to determine if he has been converted and should be received.

(1) This event occurred after Saul had been converted and had been a member of one congregation (compare verses 18,23). He was seeking, not to be baptized, but to associate with Christians in a new area.

(2) Not everyone then, and no one today, can give an "experience" like Saul had. He saw Jesus to qualify him as an apostle. People today are converted by hearing and obeying the message taught by the inspired apostles. Our inquiries today should focus on what a man did to be saved, what evidence there is of faithful service and proper beliefs after conversion, and what testimony witnesses may give to verify these facts.

(3) No majority vote was involved. Either the man was Scripturally converted and was remaining faithful or not, as in cases of congregational discipline. If the evidence indicated he was not converted Scripturally or had been guilty of unrepented sin, then he must not be received. If the evidence indicated he was converted Scripturally, and no evidence indicated sin, he must be received. It is a matter of comparing a man's life to the Bible (Matthew 7:15-23), just like in church discipline matters. It is not a matter of majority rule or a popularity contest. All must act on the basis of Scriptural principles.

9:29,30 – Saul fled from Jerusalem to avoid persecution.

Having been received by the church, Saul preached boldly in Jerusalem, disputing with Hellenists (much as Stephen had done – see Acts 6). Again, as they had done with Stephen, these Jews determined to kill Saul. And as in Damascus, the brethren had to take measures to save him by sending him away. Ironically, the Christians whom he once persecuted were now saving him from his persecutors.

They sent him to Caesarea, a seaport town, and from there to Tarsus. Tarsus was a city in Asia Minor, which was the city where Saul had originally lived (22:3; see *map*). Saul himself later said he had received a direct revelation from God warning him to leave. God told Saul he would preach to Gentiles "far hence" (Acts 22:17-21).

At this point, nothing more is told about Saul till chapter 11. He was no doubt preaching in the meantime in and around Tarsus (note Galatians 1:21-24).

9:31 – The churches in that region enjoyed a time of peace.

Luke's account next briefly summarized conditions in the churches in the area of Palestine. Note that there were churches (plural) in the regions of Judea, Galilee, and Samaria (see map; compare Acts 1:8 for the progress of the gospel).

Saul had initiated much of the persecution against Christians. When he was converted, the persecution then was concentrated against him. Now he had left to Tarsus, and peace resulted for the churches, and they multiplied.

They were edified or built up in the teaching of the Lord (compare Ephesians 4:15,16; Romans 15:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:12-14; 10:23-25).

They walked with proper fear, respect, or reverence for the Lord, which fear would lead to obedience. They were comforted by the message of the Holy Spirit delivered by inspired men.

Peter's Preaching in Lydda and Joppa – 9:32-43

9:32-35 - The Healing of Aeneas

9:32 – Meanwhile, Peter had been preaching in the surrounding area.

The story at this point returns to Peter. Since the church had been scattered from Jerusalem, our only contact with him had been when he went to Samaria with John to give the Holy Spirit to the converts there (8:14ff). Here we are told that he went on a preaching tour throughout the whole area.

He came to Lydda, a town northeast of Jerusalem, toward the Great Sea, but not on the coast (see *map*). This town was located on the south-east end of the Plain of Sharon.

9:33,34 – Aeneas was healed of paralysis.

In Lydda was a paralyzed man named Aeneas. He had been confined to bed for 8 years because of his paralysis. Peter called on the power of Jesus to heal Aeneas, and told him to arise and make his bed. He arose immediately.

Here again is a Bible example of a miracle which, as in Acts 3 (and elsewhere), clearly demonstrates the characteristics of true Bible miracles. In so doing, it shows how Bible miracles differ from the frauds which modern faith healers put forth as miracles.

(1) The problem was real and obvious to all. Aeneas had been so paralyzed that he was bedfast for 8 years. He already lived in the region where Saul healed him, so people would have known him and his case. Surely he was not just play acting to convince the people, nor was he a stranger from out of town. As a result, the people could know him and easily confirm his health problem and his healing.

(2) The cure was obvious and complete. He arose and made his bed – the bed he had been unable to leave for 8 years. The people were able to observe for themselves that he was healed (compare verse 35), not just then but for some time after as well. As with the lame man in Acts 3, a person who had been unable to walk for 8 years would not have the strength to immediately walk again, even if the original paralysis left. But this man was completely healed.

(3) The cure was instantaneous – immediate. It did not take months, years, or even hours. It happened as soon as the man of God said it should.

All this confirms that it was an event impossible by natural law. It cannot be explained away as psychosomatic or some kind of mistake or hallucination. Peter took an extremely difficult and obvious case and convincingly healed the man. The only possible explanation is that a miracle occurred.

9:35 – People came to believe in the Lord as a result.

The effect of the miracle on the people also demonstrated the purpose of miracles: people from all around saw Aeneas and turned to the Lord. Sharon is the plain where Lydda was located.

The purpose of the miracle here, as elsewhere, was to confirm the word so people would have evidence on which to base their faith. Compassion on people's physical circumstances was truly a secondary motive in some miracles (see Matthew 14:14; 15:32). But the primary motive was compassion on people's spiritual circumstances: people needed truth so they could be saved, and that truth needed to be confirmed by miracles so they would know it was from God (Acts 14:3; Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3,4; John 20:30f; compare Acts 3).

Many miracles were performed when confirmation of the word would result, though there was no element of compassion toward the one who received the effect of the miracle (Acts 5:1-11; 13:6-12; Matthew 27:51-54; 14:25-27,33; 1 Kings 18:20-40). But where was even one miracle performed out of compassion on physical circumstances when confirmation was not involved? On the other hand, some people needed healing, yet healing was not given because confirmation of the word was not needed or would not be accomplished (1 Timothy 5:23; 2 Timothy 4:20; 2 Corinthians 12:7ff; etc.)

So, again the purpose of miracles were demonstrated to the people, and to us, by this great miracle.

Note that this passage illustrates a general use of the term "all," which implied a general condition. Yet surely not literally everyone in the whole area became a believer.

9:36-43 - The Raising of Dorcas

9:36 – Luke next introduces the case of Dorcas, a woman of good works.

Here begins the account of another miracle done about this time to confirm the gospel Peter was preaching. This one, if anything, is more amazing than the last one.

There was a disciple named Tabitha, translated Dorcas (meaning “gazelle”). She lived in Joppa, a city on the seacoast of the Mediterranean, northwest of Lydda (see *map*). She was full of good works and charitable deeds (alms deeds).

Sometimes women think, because they must submit to men and cannot take leadership in public assemblies, that there is little or nothing they can do to be useful in the Lord’s work. Nothing could be further from the truth. Some of the most useful servants of God throughout history have been women, and Dorcas proves this for all women of all time. See further notes on verse 39 specifically regarding what she did.

9:37 – Dorcas became ill and died.

The Bible definitely and unequivocally says she *died*. And she apparently had been dead for some time when Peter eventually arrived, though we are not told exactly how long. The body had been washed and laid in an upper room (as at a “wake” in a funeral home). After she died, Peter was informed and came to the place. Meantime, mourners had been informed and had gathered. Enough time had passed that there can be no doubt she was dead.

9:38,39 – When Peter arrived, he was shown the evidence of Dorcas’ good deeds.

Lydda, where Peter had healed the lame man (verse 32), was not far from Joppa. The disciples had heard that Peter was at Lydda, so they sent two men to ask him to come without delay. Their intent is not clearly revealed. Perhaps they hoped he could bring comfort and consolation. It does not seem likely that they expected him to do the miracle that he eventually did, since we have no record of an apostle raising the dead before this.

It just seems natural that Christians want spiritual teachers present to give comfort and consolation in time of death, especially death of a faithful Christian. This appears to have always been so, and is still true today. We cannot raise the dead as Peter did here, but we can give comfort (Romans 12:15; 15:4).

When Peter arrived and came into the room where the body was, people were mourning her. It is not wrong to mourn the death of a Christian, though we have no cause for sorrow as for those who have no hope of eternal life (compare notes on Acts 8:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:13). In their mourning, people were remembering specific deeds the deceased person

had done. This too is natural and is commonly done today when loved ones pass away.

In particular, the widows were showing the coats (tunics) and garments Dorcas made. Obviously this was part of the good works that filled her life (verse 36). This illustrates the kind of work that can occupy faithful Christian women today. They can make or otherwise obtain and provide what is needed by people who cannot care for themselves, such as widows.

This is just part of good works for women (see 1 Timothy 5:9-14; Titus 2:3ff; Proverbs 31:10ff; etc.). There is no justification for Christian women to feel “bored” and have “nothing to do.” There is plenty to do. Study your Bible to find what God wants, open your eyes, and go to work! Is this the kind of work Christian women today involve themselves in, or do they instead prefer to work to make money for their enjoyment and that of their family?

9:40,41 – Peter raised Dorcas from the dead.

Peter sent the people out, knelt and prayed, then told Tabitha to arise. She opened her eyes, saw Peter, and sat up. Peter took her by the hand and lifted her up. He called the widows and Christians (saints) and showed them she was alive.

Here God definitely accomplished through Peter the miracle of raising the dead (compare Matthew 10:8). This is similar to what Jesus did on some occasions when He raised the dead (compare Matthew 9:25). Some miracles were harder than others, required more faith, and were accompanied by fasting and prayer (Matthew 17:14-20; Mark 9:14-29). Perhaps putting others out of the room helped Peter concentrate on the need.

Other New Testament examples of raising the dead: Matthew 9:18-25; John 11:38ff; Luke 7:11ff; Acts 20:9-11.

9:42,43 – This miracle also led people to believe on the Lord.

This event, like the healing of Aeneas, became widely known and led many people to believe in Jesus. Again, this was the purpose of miracles, and we see all the characteristics of true Bible miracles present here. Knowing these characteristics helps us distinguish true miracles from the frauds people today sometime claim are miracles.

That Dorcas was dead was unquestionable, as already described. Many people saw her body and were present with the body before Peter arrived. Considerable time passed after she died before she was raised. That she truly came back to life is equally clear, for many people saw her alive again immediately after Peter raised her. The miracle was instantaneous and complete. It was performed on a local person whom the people knew. It was clearly contrary to natural law and could only occur by the supernatural power of God.

This event clearly contrasts to events that people today often claim to be miracles. Comparing them helps us recognize false “miracle-workers.” For example, I once attended a debate involving a man named John Wilson who claimed he was an apostle, was baptized in the Holy Spirit, and had power to do miracles like the apostles did. When challenged to raise the dead, he responded, “Where is any case in the Bible that an apostle raised the dead?” The man not only did not have the power from the Holy Spirit to **do** miracles like the apostles, but he did not even know enough about the message of the Holy Spirit to be aware of the kind of miracles the apostles did!

There is, in this Bible account, great emotion. First there was great sorrow when Dorcas died. Then there was surely great joy when she was raised. How would you and I have felt to be there? Doesn't it make you want to meet Dorcas in heaven? Even if we too have died, we will be raised as surely as she was. Yet this amazing story is told calmly in a few verses by the inspired write Luke. Modern faith-healers, if they could ever do such a thing as this, would publicize it far and wide so as to make a major spectacle of it. But Bible accounts are calm and factual because the purpose is to produce faith, not to make big bucks.

Finally, the story ended as we are told that Peter stayed awhile in Joppa at the home of a man called Simon a tanner. He was still there as we pass into the next great conversion story involving Peter (chapter 10). We know little more about this Simon, except that he was a tanner. Tanning is the process of preparing animal skins so they can be used for leather, etc. This was considered an unclean occupation by many Jews. And most animal rights advocates of our day would likewise consider the use of animal skins for human purposes to be cruel and even immoral. Yet Peter had no problem associating and even living with such a man.

Acts 10

The Conversion of Cornelius — 10:1-11:18

10:1-8 - The Appearance of the Angel to Cornelius

10:1 – Cornelius was a centurion living in Caesarea.

A man named Cornelius is here introduced as being a centurion living in Caesarea (see **map**). Caesarea was a seaport a fairly long distance north of Joppa on the Mediterranean Sea. A centurion was a captain of one hundred men in the Roman army.

We know Cornelius was a Gentile because of his position in the army, his Latin name, and the statements of 10:28,34,35,44,45; 11:1,3,18. The context of these comments indicates that no Gentile had as yet received the gospel (compare 15:7-11). The Jews who had become Christians evidently believed that the gospel was a national religion for Jews, just like the Old Testament had been. Events in this account will show how God convinced Peter and others that the gospel is for all.

10:2 – Cornelius was a man of good character. He was devout, feared God, gave much alms, and prayed to God.

He was devout (ευσεβησ) – pious, godly, reverencing, as manifested by actions (see Vine).

He feared God (φοβεω; compare verse 22) – a reverential fear or respect. Robertson says this implies Cornelius was some type of believer in Judaism, but not strictly a proselyte for he was as yet uncircumcised and so unacceptable for Jewish association (11:3).

He gave much alms to the people (compare verses 4,31). Alms are charitable gifts: donations to help the poor and needy. Often people think that a generous, charitable, sharing person is surely acceptable to God. And these surely are good qualities. Cornelius gave much to charity and needy people, but he still needed to be saved.

He prayed to God always – i.e., regularly, frequently. (Compare 10:30,31)

He was a concerned family man – He feared God with all his house. Not only was he trying to serve God, but he was leading his whole family to do right. (Compare verses 24,33.)

In general, he was a good moral man with a good reputation. His servants said he was “a just (righteous – ASV) man,” well reported of by the Jews (verse 22).

Is this your concept of a lost sinner? Most people today would say surely such a man is saved. Even some members of the church object to teaching that implies such people are lost. “Look how devout and sincere these people are. They believe in the same God you do. They worship God sincerely. They are just as devout and zealous as you are. I just can’t bring myself to believe such a person is lost.”

This man had all these qualities, but the angel of the Lord said he still needed to be saved (11:14).

Other sincere religious people in the Bible were also lost.

The Ethiopian Treasurer (see notes on Acts 8) had been to Jerusalem to worship (verse 27). He worshiped and served the true God of the Bible. He was reading Isaiah as he traveled (verses 28ff). Nevertheless, prior to his conversion in Acts 8, he was a lost man. He did not know about Jesus and had not been baptized.

Saul of Tarsus was a Jew instructed in the law, zealous for God (Acts 22:3). He lived in all good conscience (23:1). He was advanced in the Jews’ religion, and more zealous than other Jews (Galatians 1:14). He was a Hebrew of Hebrews, blameless according to the law (Philippians 3:5,6). Yet he later realized that He was the chief of sinners and needed salvation in Jesus (1 Timothy 1:15).

Romans 10:1-3 – Jews in general had a zeal for God. They worshiped the true God of the Bible and they did so with zeal. But Paul said they needed to be saved.

If you are a zealous, devout believer in God, that is good. You need to do this. But you may do all this and still be like Cornelius – a lost sinner. The point is that more is needed.

Note that some people argue that Cornelius was a centurion and that justifies Christians participating in carnal warfare. However:

(1) Soldiers in Palestine were a police force, enforcing the laws of the government in power, not fighting opposing armies from a different nation. So Cornelius’ position would be more parallel to that of a policeman today.

(2) There is no indication he ever went to combat against a foreign enemy after his conversion. There are many people today who serve in the military but never go into combat.

The best that can honestly be said regarding Cornelius is that his case tells us nothing one way or another whether or not a Christian is permitted to participate in carnal warfare.

10:3 – An angel appeared and spoke to Cornelius.

About the ninth hour (3:00 PM) he saw a vision (ὄραμα) – literally, “that which is seen.” In Scripture this often means an inspired revelation by means of something a person sees (compare Acts 9:10; 10:3,17,19; 11:5; 12:9; 16:9,10; 18:9).

In this case what appeared to Cornelius was an angel of God who spoke to Him. But this appeared during daylight (3:00 PM), hence was no delusion. (For other accounts of this vision see 10:22,30-32; 11:13,14.)

10:4 – The angel assured Cornelius that God remembered his prayers and alms.

Cornelius was afraid and asked what was wanted of him. Verse 30 says this vision occurred while Cornelius was keeping the ninth hour of prayer in his house. The angel is called a “holy angel” (verse 22) and “a man in bright apparel” (verse 30).

The angel told Cornelius his prayers and alms had come up as a memorial to God. Verse 31 says “thy prayer is heard and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.” No further explanation is given, but apparently Cornelius’ prayers and alms caused God to remember Cornelius in his need for salvation (compare Exodus 3:7). His efforts were not unnoticed or unappreciated. It could also mean that Cornelius reminded God of His promise to save Gentiles under the gospel.

Once again note that the denominational world would almost surely consider such a man as Cornelius to already be saved. Not only was he a generous, devout, morally decent man, but an angel had actually appeared to him to tell him that his prayers and alms were a memorial before God. How many denominational preachers could be consistent with their doctrine and deny that such a man was saved? This simply shows that the doctrine of such denominations is not gospel doctrine.

Note that God said He heard the prayer of an unsaved man. John 9:31 and similar verses say God does not hear sinners. There are many things sinners have no right to pray for, including forgiveness of sins; and there are rebellious sinners from whom God will hear no prayer at all. But God has promised to “fill” those who hunger and thirst after righteousness (Matthew 5:6). If one diligently seeks to know the truth, God will give him opportunity. We are not told what Cornelius prayed for, but we are told what answer he was given: he was granted in response to his prayer, not direct forgiveness, but an opportunity to hear the gospel. In any case, God did not “hear” Cornelius in the same sense that he “hears” faithful Christians. There is no assurance that God was willing to grant Cornelius’ requests in general, as with God’s children.

10:5,6 – The angel said to send for Peter who would tell him what to do.

Here again, as in the cases of the eunuch and Saul (see notes there) the gospel message must be delivered through inspired men – human

agents. Forgiveness was not granted directly on the basis of prayer. The sinner had to hear and obey the gospel, including baptism (verse 48).

The angel did not tell Cornelius the words whereby he could be saved, but insisted he send for the inspired man to tell him. Why so, if people can be saved directly or can be told directly by the Holy Spirit what to do apart from the word? The answer is that no one was ever told how to be saved except through the teaching of inspired men.

It is further interesting that there are only two cases where God communicated directly with a sinner in the gospel age, and both those cases were exceptions that cannot be repeated today: (1) Saul was called to be an apostle, and (2) Cornelius was the first Gentile convert. In all other cases, if God communicated directly with anyone, it was with the teacher, not with the student.

10:7,8 – As instructed, Cornelius sent for Peter.

In obedience to the angel, Cornelius called two household servants and a soldier (who was also “devout”). Cornelius explained to these men what had happened (compare verse 19), and sent them to bring Peter.

10:9-22 - Peter’s Vision

10:9,10 – Peter fell into a trance as he prayed.

On the following day, as the three servants were approaching Joppa, Peter was on the housetop praying. This was around the sixth hour (noon). Praying on a housetop is unknown in our society, but in that region housetops were often flat with low walls surrounding them (like balconies). They were designed to constitute part of the living area and were commonly used for such activities as this.

Peter was hungry and wanted to eat. But while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance that is then described. It is also referred to in 11:5-10. 10:17 says it was a vision, and 11:5 says Peter saw a vision while in a trance.

“Trance” (ἔκστασις) is “a mental state in which the senses are partially or wholly suspended and the person is unconscious of his environment while he contemplates some extraordinary object” (*Zondervan’s Pictorial Bible Dictionary*). So, the vision is the thing seen, and the trance is the mental state at the time. Again, this occurred at noon, hence broad daylight.

Peter’s hunger is mentioned, apparently, because it relates to the content of the vision. God used Peter’s hunger to show him various kinds of food to eat, then taught a lesson from it.

10:11,12 – Peter saw something like a sheet containing all kinds of animals.

In this vision, Peter saw a vessel which was similar to a great sheet, held up at the four corners. This was let down as out of heaven to the

earth. In this sheet were all kinds of animals, four-footed beasts, creeping things, and birds. As the story develops we will learn that these animals were things which were ceremonially unclean for Jews to eat. (“Creeping things,” according to Vine, were serpents, reptiles, etc.)

10:13-16 – When Peter refused to eat, he was told not to consider as common that which God had cleansed.

A voice told Peter to get up, kill of these animals that he saw, and eat. (This is, apparently, why God chose to send the vision at a time when Peter was hungry.) But Peter refused because the animals were ceremonially unclean under the law, and he had never eaten anything unclean (compare Leviticus 11; 20:25; Deuteronomy 14:4-20).

Though Peter was under the gospel, he was still eating only the certain kinds of food permitted by the Old Law. That is not wrong in and of itself. The gospel did not require people to eat these animals. But Peter needed to learn that those Old Testament rules of clean and unclean animals were no longer binding, plus a far greater lesson even than that.

The voice replied, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.” This whole scenario was repeated three times, then the vessel returned to heaven. The repetition of the event was obviously for emphasis and to make sure Peter did not forget or miss what was really happening. If it happened just once, one might afterward think he just imagined it or might have misunderstood what happened or might think it was not important. The repetition made it something he could not doubt as being true and important.

This was obviously a perplexing event, and even Peter was perplexed about its meaning (verse 17).

What lessons should be learned?

The main point will be explained as the story proceeds, but we learn this:

(1) We must not oppose any act of God. If God does an act or declares a thing to be a certain way, then it is so regardless of what we may have believed in the past. We must not argue, disagree, or try to change it.

(2) Laws of ceremonial unclean animals have been done away in the gospel (compare Mark 7:18,19; 1 Timothy 4:1-5; Romans 14; Colossians 2:14-17). In fact, all Old Testament laws have ceased to be binding and have been replaced by the New Testament (though many Old Testament laws are repeated in the New Testament and are binding because they are in the new). God had given the Old Testament law, including the laws of unclean foods. Having given those laws, He had the right to remove them. See Hebrews 10:1-10; 7:11-14; 8:6-13; 9:1-4; 2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Galatians 3:24,25; 5:1-6; Romans 7:1-7; Ephesians 2:11-16; Colossians 2:13-17.

But at this point in the history, the Jewish Christians did not understand and appreciate the significance of the Old Law being removed. If we put ourselves in their position, we can appreciate their difficulty. Much prophecy had predicted the salvation of the Gentiles, and some even predicted the replacement of the Old Law. But the Jews were so thoroughly convinced they were God's chosen people that it took much hard work to convince them of the change God really intended. And even today there are many people, including many who claim to be Christian, who still do not realize the significance of the change from Old to New Testament.

Yet the greatest lesson of all is yet to be unfolded as the story proceeds.

10:17,18 – The men sent from Cornelius arrived at Simon's house and asked for Peter.

Peter was confused, wondering about the meaning of the vision. Meantime, the servants had arrived from Cornelius. They had inquired to find Simon's house, arrived at the gate, and asked for Peter.

Consider this as the story proceeds: When inspired men received revelation, they themselves did not necessarily understand the significance of the revelation. God's means of revelation gave facts or truths to inspired men, usually truths to be repeated to others. But the men who received the revelation had to study on the revelation, just as did the other people who were told the revelation (including people today) must study in order to understand the meaning.

This proves the revelation was not the invention of the inspired men. They were not speaking from their own wisdom, nor did they speak things they had developed from their own learning. On the contrary, they spoke whatever God revealed, whether or not they understood it. And in many cases, after they received the revelation, they had to ponder the meaning of it just like we do.

10:19,20 – The Holy Spirit told Peter the men had arrived and that he should go with them having no doubts.

What is more, as Peter was thinking about the vision, he received yet another revelation. This time the Holy Spirit told Peter about the men who had arrived and were looking for him. Peter was told that these men were sent by the Spirit, so Peter was to go with them and not doubt, question, or object to going with them.

In 11:12 Peter said the Spirit told him to go with the men "making no distinction." These expressions show that Peter was to rest assured that it was the Spirit's will for him to go with these men. There is no indication Peter yet knew these men were Gentiles. But he would soon learn that and would no doubt have refused to go had he not received these revelations. The purpose then was to convince him to go with these Gentiles despite his preconceived views as a Jew.

10:21,22 – The messengers briefly told Cornelius’ story.

As directed by the Spirit, Peter went down and told the men he was the one they were looking for. The passage does not say whether or not he heard them say who they were asking for, but the Spirit had told him whom they sought. The very fact these three men were there would confirm to Peter that the message had been from God and that these were the men he was to receive and go with.

He asked the reason why they were looking for him. The Spirit had not told him this, but just to go with them. No doubt he was filled with curiosity after the vision and then the revelation. They rehearsed the account of the angel’s visit to Cornelius (as in verses 1-8). In doing so they again described Cornelius as follows:

He was “a just man” (or “righteous”) – upright according to the law (compare Luke 1:6; 2:25). This does not mean his sins were forgiven yet (compare 11:14), but in the view of his servants he was faithful to the law. He feared God (see verse 2).

He had a good reputation among the Jews. This implied that the Jews would look favorably on his life, not necessarily that he was a proselyte (see notes on verse 2). It perhaps would also reassure Peter, as a Jew, to go with them to see Cornelius.

It is interesting that God chose such an exemplary individual to be the first Gentile convert. No doubt these facts of character made it easier for the Jews to believe that God would want such a person to learn the gospel and be saved.

Peter now had three interesting facts to ponder: (1) a vision in which he was told to eat unclean foods and should not make common what God had cleansed; (2) a revelation from the Spirit telling him to go with these men; (3) testimony that the man he was to go see was a Gentile of great character, and an angel had told this Gentile to send for Peter to tell him words. The plot thickens, but we still have no explicit statement what this is all about.

10:23-43 - Peter’s Sermon to Cornelius

10:23 – Peter and other brethren accompanied Cornelius’ messengers the next day.

Peter lodged the men that night. This of itself was amazing by Jewish standards, since Jews had no association with Gentiles. It is only sensible to conclude that these men were also Gentiles. The soldier would surely have been one. And Jews would not likely have been servants to a Roman centurion. Yet Peter, based on the situation as revealed to him, was obedient. He not only went with these men despite his reservations about Gentiles, but he first gave them a place to spend the night.

Next day Peter went with the men, and took some brethren from Joppa with him (11:12 says there were six men). These men became important because they served as witnesses of the events that occurred (see

10:45,46; 11:12). It is not clear how much Peter understood at this point, but he obviously knew something major was about to occur and wanted witnesses for it.

10:24 – When Peter arrived, Cornelius had friends and relatives waiting.

Next day Peter and his company arrived at Caesarea and went to Cornelius' house. Cornelius was waiting for them, having called all his relatives and close friends together. No doubt many, if not all, of these relatives and friends were also Gentiles.

Surely this shows his zeal for truth, and is an admirable example for us. He knew he was about to receive some major new truth and he wanted others to receive it as well. He gives us an excellent illustration of how we can spread the gospel ourselves: by having Bible studies in our home, and inviting friends and relatives to come and study with us (compare 20:20).

10:25,26 – Cornelius bowed to honor Peter, but Peter told him to stand up because Peter was also a man.

As Peter entered the room, Cornelius fell at his feet and worshiped him. We are not told whether this happened because of his religious background or because he was overwhelmed by the fact he knew Peter was the fulfillment of the angel's promise. In any case, Peter would not allow it.

Peter raised Cornelius up saying, "Stand up; I myself am also a man." Note the reason why Peter refused to allow this act of religious honor: because he was a man. The fact one is a man is, of itself, reason enough to conclude that men have no right to bow in religious reverence or as a form of religious respect. The same is true when done toward angels or any created thing (Revelation 22:8,9; Romans 1:25). Only God the Creator can rightly be worshiped (Matthew 4:10).

Nevertheless, Roman Popes, who claim to be successors to Peter, not only allow but almost expect the very thing that here was refused by the one they claim was the first Pope! Likewise, the Roman church allows and encourages people to kneel to statues of Mary, saints, etc. All such is forbidden in this passage because these also are humans, and that is reason enough why no one should bow in religious honor to any of them.

Some respond that they are bowing, not to worship the man, but to show respect because the man is a representative of God. So they bow to worship the God who sent the man.

But Peter also was a representative of God, yet the fact remains that Peter said to ***stand up*** and forbade the bowing, period. He did not say it would be acceptable provided they made sure they were doing it because he was a representative of God. He said to stop it! Bowing to a man

as a form of religious honor or in religious activity of any kind is wrong regardless of what we think about the man.

Why don't the modern Popes ever stop people from bowing to them? Is there no one today who bows giving improper honor to the Pope? When the hordes of people bow to him, do they all do so with proper motives and proper understanding? Why did Peter forbid it the only recorded time it happened to him, but modern Popes never forbid it?

If the Bible allows men to bow in religious honor to men, where is the passage that so states, whether to the Pope, Mary, etc.? We have a passage here that forbids it, and Revelation 22:8,9 even forbids it to angels. Where is the passage that says it is all right in some cases? The verse does not exist. What we have is an absolute prohibition.

10:27-29 – Peter explained that he had learned not to call men common or unclean.

Peter went into the house where the people were gathered (compare verse 24). Then he began by explaining why he was willing to come into this house of Gentiles. In so doing he explains the purpose for which the various revelations had been given.

He said it was not lawful for a Jewish man to associate or keep company with one of another nation (Gentiles). But God had showed Peter not to call any man common or unclean. This is why he had come to them without objection (verse 29 – “gainsaying” in some translations). He then proceeded to ask why they had sent for him.

This shows that Peter had come to understand the purpose behind the revelations God had given. God had given Peter a revelation about **animals** and then said not to call things common or unclean if God had cleansed them. But Peter had by this time understood what had at first confused Him (verse 17). The lesson pertained to **men**, not primarily to animals. Peter understood this conclusion based on the further revelation that he was to go with the men sent from Cornelius and that Cornelius had received a message from an angel telling him to send for Peter.

The conclusion necessarily followed that God did not want people to be considered common or unclean on the basis of race or nationality. Just as Jews considered some animals to be unclean and therefore unfit to eat, so they considered some people to be unclean and unfit to associate with. God had changed this. He considered them cleansed, so for Peter or any of us to consider them unclean or unfit would be to oppose God.

This principle of gospel truth should likewise rule today. Yet some still consider certain people unworthy of their association because they are of a different race or nationality. Racial strife, hatred, and bitterness separates men. Some Christians are not willing to worship with other Christians because of such differences. All such is sin and violates God's

clear teaching that we are all one in Christ (Galatians 3:28,29). Christ died, not just to save men from sin, but also to remove the Old Testament along with its racial barriers (compare Ephesians 2:11ff). Only the gospel can change men's hearts sufficiently to remove these alienations.

However, though he was now willing to associate with these Gentiles, Peter still did not realize he could baptize them so they could be received as Christians and members of the church on equal standing with Jews (see verses 29ff). This conclusion would require one more miracle to bring about (verses 44ff). Note that all this is discussed and the conclusions stated again in 11:1ff and in chapter 15). (Coffman suggests that Peter stated all these things, not because he still had doubts that Gentiles could be baptized, but in order that the Jewish brethren with him and other Jewish Christians could understand the point when they learned what had happened.)

We have here a perfect example in which God taught by implication and expected His people to learn the lesson by necessary inference.

Four revelations were eventually given. The conclusion was that Jews could associate with Gentiles and in fact Gentiles could be believe, repent, be baptized and be saved like Jews. This conclusion necessarily followed from these revelations, yet it was not directly stated in any of them. Peter and the other Jews were expected by God to reason to the conclusion and to understand the significance. Further, this evidence was later used to bring other Jews to the same conclusion (chapter 11 & 15).

[In 11:14 Cornelius had been told by the angel that Peter would tell him words by which he and he house could be saved. This directly stated that salvation would be made available to them, but that had not yet been told to Peter – see verse 32. And even so it did not say they should be taught to believe, repent, and be baptized – that would require an obvious but unstated conclusion. Nor would it prove that Gentiles would be saved on the same terms or conditions that Jews were saved. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is what convinced people of that, and was so used by Peter in chapter 11 and chapter 15.]

And the conclusion was binding. Peter plainly said, “God has shown me that I **should** ...” This was revelation from God, just as binding as any other form of revelation. And those who would not accept it were told they would be withstanding God (11:17,18). Peter himself later violated the lesson he learned here, and for that Paul rebuked him (Galatians 2:11-14). The doctrine here established is one of the main doctrines of the New Testament, and the salvation of all of us who are Gentiles depends on it, yet it was taught here by necessary inference!

Finally note how this demonstrates that the gospel came by gradual revelation, in parts and stages, not all at once. Miracles like these were necessary to complete the revelation and confirm it till it had all been

given (1 Corinthians 13:8-11). But we today do not need such supernatural powers, since the truth is now recorded for us in Scripture, as are the miracles that confirm the revelation.

10:30-33 – Cornelius described the vision of the angel.

Peter then asked why Cornelius had sent for him, and Cornelius retold the story of the appearance of the angel to him (see notes on verses 3-6).

Having seen this angel, Cornelius did as he was told and sent immediately for Peter. He then stated the purpose of the gathering: They were all present before God to hear all things commanded by God.

What an admirable attitude! When we assemble in worship or Bible study, we are present ***before God***. God is present, seeing what we do, reading our hearts, and observing the attitude with which we receive His message. We should, like Cornelius, want to be present at such opportunities and want to learn God's will for our lives.

Yet many have far too little interest in really learning God's commands. They neglect opportunities to gather to learn God's will. They act disrespectfully or indifferently when they do come, daydreaming, laughing, whispering, and joking privately, etc. Who can imagine Cornelius doing such? Others accept only those parts of God's commands which they like or agree with, but rationalize disobeying others.

We need to develop the attitude of Cornelius and his acquaintances toward God's word. If we do, we will be glad when the church arranges such opportunities, we will come if at all possible, will listen respectfully, will invite others as he did, will learn all we can, will study further on our own, and will apply the message of God in our lives.

10:34,35 – Peter stated that God is not partial but accepts all those who fear and obey Him.

Peter introduced his message by stating the unique lesson we (and the Jewish Christians) should learn from this example of conversion: God is no respecter of persons. He does not show partiality or play favorites (compare Romans 2:11; James 2:1ff).

In this context the specific application is that it does not matter what nationality or race a man is; God will accept that individual if he fears God and works righteousness.

All people are welcome and able to serve God, so that the relationship we have with God is now determined by our own conduct and attitude. But as in many other Bible passages, Peter was here stating a broad general principle, which he then applied to the case of Gentiles. The broad principle extends likewise to other physical aspects beyond our control for which we are not responsible or which otherwise are not essential to salvation. God does not respect man's person (wealth, nationality, beauty, etc.). If I am poor, uncomely, handicapped, or otherwise physically underprivileged or minority, God still loves me as I am.

However, faith and conduct do matter to God. This is subject to our control, and it is on that basis that He does determine His attitude toward us. This disproves the argument of some that they are born with characteristics such as homosexuality and can't help it, so we should not condemn them. They need to realize that such matters are forms of conduct, not physical characteristics. One can refuse to practice homosexuality, no matter what characteristics he has or has not inherited. Such is not a true minority status which has no effect on one's standing before God. So God has elsewhere clearly stated that such conduct is included in that which He will not accept (1 Corinthians 6:9-11 & 1 Timothy 1:9-11; Romans 1:26-32; Genesis 19:1-11; 2 Peter 2:6-8; Leviticus 18:22,23; 20:13,15,16).

Further, other passages show that we as humans ought to practice this same principle in our treatment of others. We too should not show partiality or respect of persons – James 2:1ff. It is wrong to belittle people or count them inferior or unacceptable as Christians because of race, nationality, handicaps, poverty, lack of physical beauty, or other physical problem beyond their control or responsibility. However, we may and should value people and respect them according to their conduct according to God's word.

And note again we are told that what is necessary for any man to be acceptable to God is both his attitude and his conduct: *fear God and work righteousness.*

It is not a matter of one or the other, but both are required. We must have proper attitudes of heart including faith, love for God, etc. But these attitudes must lead to **obedience**. Note that the context states that these conditions are required in conversion, becoming a Christian. Here again is a passage that contradicts the idea people are saved by "faith only" without obedience. Remember this when studying v43 and 15:9,11 and other passages that people claim prove salvation by faith only. Saving faith includes obedience, it does not exclude it.

Finally note that this passage destroys the Calvinistic concept of **unconditional** predestination and election. That doctrine claims that God will save men (or cause them to be lost) on the basis of decisions over which man has no control. Without consideration of man's character, will, or choice (so we are told) God determined before times eternal to unconditionally save certain ones and send all others to eternal torment. What could possibly constitute greater "respect of persons" than that? On the contrary, the passage teaches that what matters is our fear toward God and our works.

10:36,37 – God had spoken through the preaching of Jesus, who is Lord of all.

The application of Peter's statement in verses 34,35 was that everyone in the audience needed to learn the gospel – they needed to be taught

what to believe and obey – else there was no point in Peter’s bothering to even preach to them. He had established that these people could be acceptable to God, so he proceeded to give them the gospel message.

He began by emphasizing that the message of the gospel had been sent to the children of Israel. It was preached to Jews throughout Judea and Galilee beginning after John’s baptism. That was a message of peace that all men could have through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. This peace refers to peace between God and man by means of forgiveness of sins (Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:11ff).

Until this time no effort had been made to preach that message to Gentiles. Yet they “knew” it, perhaps in the sense that they had heard various stories about Jesus and His popularity and death. But their knowledge was second-hand and indirect. The message had actually been preached only to Israelites.

This Jesus, however, was Lord of all, and that included Gentiles as well as Jews. They needed to hear the message because they were subject to it the same as Jews were. Note that, for Jesus to be Lord of all, would mean He is Deity. What created being, even an angel, could be viewed as Lord of all? Furthermore, all are obligated to obey Him. His authority extends over all, regardless of whether or not they recognize His authority and choose to obey, Jew and Gentile.

10:38 – Under the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus did good, including miracles.

Peter then presented, as had been done repeatedly in Acts, the proofs that demonstrate Jesus to be who He claimed to be. Jesus had power to heal people because God was with Him and had anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and power. This clearly refers to His miracles. This is the first evidence Peter offers to confirm Jesus’ claims (see notes on Acts 2:22; etc. etc.). Note that the point is not that Jesus would have been unable to do miracles without the Holy Spirit (like the apostles could do them only by the Holy Spirit), but that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit worked together. Note how all three Beings of the Godhead are here mentioned.

And note that sick people are stated by inspiration to be oppressed by the devil. Contrary to many people’s misconceptions, God is not the One to be blamed because people become ill or die. These problems occur because the devil oppresses certain people (as with Job in Job 1&2) or because sin is in the world and that too came about because of the influence of the devil.

10:39-41 – Peter affirmed Jesus’ death and resurrection.

As he had done so often in preaching about Jesus, Peter affirmed again that he and others were witnesses of Jesus’ deeds among the Jews

and of His death. Note that, though it was the Romans who actually crucified Jesus, Peter here says the Jews killed Him, just as he had said repeatedly beginning on Pentecost (see notes on Acts 2-7).

But Jesus did not remain dead. On the third day, God raised Him and caused Him to begin appearing to others. The appearances, however, were not to people in general or at random, but to specially chosen witnesses like Peter himself.

Why to these special witnesses, rather to others? The point is not that these would be gullible and easily convinced: the accounts of Jesus' appearances show that the apostles were anything but gullible. Rather, as Peter states here, those chosen knew Him. They had been with Him through His ministry. After He arose, they ate and drank with Him. There would be no mistake in their recognition of Him. No fraud could fool them by pretending to be Him. They were the best qualified to testify that it was really Jesus of Nazareth who was alive again.

These men were eyewitnesses in the fullest extent of the word. Cornelius, his friends, and all of us today can believe with assurance on the basis of the testimony. There is no reasonable explanation for this eyewitness testimony other than that Jesus really arose. This is the second proof Peter offered for Jesus' claims.

10:42 – The apostles were told to preach that Jesus is the Judge of the living and the dead.

These eyewitnesses (the apostles) having been given the opportunity to see Jesus, were then commanded to preach about Him to the people (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 1:8). They should testify that God had ordained Jesus to be Judge of the living and the dead (compare 17:30,31; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Matthew 25:34ff).

This explains why Peter wanted to preach this message to Cornelius and why God had made these arrangements for him to hear it. It also explains why the angel did not tell Cornelius what to do but had him send for Peter. The preaching was to be done by men who were witnesses (see notes on verses 3-6).

All people will be judged according to Jesus' teaching (John 12:48). To be ready, they need to learn His teaching now. God has provided opportunity for all men to be saved by arranging for men to preach the message.

10:43 – Prophets predicted remission of sins through faith in Jesus.

The third proof Peter offered, as on Pentecost, was fulfilled prophecy. The prophets bore witness to Jesus' work, and this confirms His claims. Specifically, the prophets predicted remission of sins through His name, and the evidence should convince us that we can have that remission if we truly believe. Compare Isaiah 53:4-12; Jeremiah 31:31-

34; and remember that the blessing to come on all nations through Abraham's seed referred to justification from sin – Acts 3:25,26.

Faith is here stated as a condition for forgiveness. One must believe in Jesus to be saved (see also Hebrews 10:39; 11:1,4-8,17,30; Romans 1:16; 4:19-21; 5:1,2; 10:9,10,13-17; Galatians 5:6; 2 Corinthians 5:7; James 2:14-26; John 1:12; 3:15-18; 8:24; 20:30,31; Mark 16:15,16). Peter had already told them in verses 34,35, however, that acceptance before God requires both fearing God and working righteousness (obedience). Compare Galatians 5:6; James 2:14-26; Hebrews 10:39; 11:8,30,7,33,4,17,24f; 1 John 3:23,24; John 6:28,29 Romans 1:5; 16:26; 2 Thessalonians 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 1:3. This obedience includes repentance and baptism in water as Peter later commanded (verses 47,48; 11:14).

To conclude that this passage is saying one need only have faith in his heart, so obedience (especially baptism) is not necessary, is to ignore the context and hosts of other passages. We may as well conclude that repentance and confession of Christ are not required, since they are not here specifically mentioned, as to conclude that baptism is not required. Furthermore, the verse expressly states that remission is received through Jesus' name – i.e., according to His authority. This shows that we must follow Jesus' teaching to receive remission, and His teaching clearly requires that faith must lead to repentance, confession, and baptism to be saved.

See also Matthew 7:21-27; 22:36-39; John 14:15,21-24; Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:6-10; 6:17,18; Hebrews 5:9; 10:39; 11:8,30; Galatians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9; James 1:21-25; 2:14-26; Luke 6:46; 1 Peter 1:22,23; 1 John 5:3; 2:3-6.

10:44-48 - The Coming of the Holy Spirit

10:44-46 – The Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius' household so they spoke in tongues.

Even as Peter spoke these words, the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius and his other Gentile friends and relatives who were listening. As a result, they spoke in tongues, magnifying God. This truly amazed the Jews who had come with Peter (verse 23), because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on Gentiles.

There is striking similarity between this and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the apostles at Pentecost.

The Spirit came directly and unexpectedly. It empowered them to speak in tongues. As in Acts 2, the tongues carried a definite, understandable message – they were magnifying God. This gift was not different from what occurred in Acts 2, but was so clearly identical that Peter later said that these Gentiles had received the like gift to what the apostles had received at the beginning (11:15,17). So, tongue speaking here must be understood to be the same as in Acts 2. It involved the power to

miraculously speak existing, known languages that the person had never studied before.

This miraculous occurrence is important especially because of the purpose it accomplished. The Jewish Christians present were amazed that Gentiles could receive the Spirit. Obviously they thought such things were only for Jews, like other Old Testament blessings had been.

Note also that, when people truly received miraculous powers from the Holy Spirit, there was no doubt among the bystanders regarding what had happened.

Honest people could not doubt or deny the event, even if they were strongly predisposed to do so. In this case, the Jewish brethren had a strong prejudice that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were not for Gentiles. This is necessarily implied by the fact the record says they were amazed when they saw for themselves that the gift had come upon the Gentiles. Yet despite their doubts and prejudices, the power of the Spirit was so obvious that even they could not deny what had happened. Such is not at all the case when so-called faith healers today claim to do miracles.

Some have used this passage to claim that people today can receive the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially tongue-speaking, like Cornelius' household did. Please read notes on Acts 1, Acts 2, and Acts 8 for previous discussions of this subject. In particular, please note that an apostle was present and directly involved in this event, as was true in every case in which anyone received miraculous powers from the Spirit. Since we have no apostles living on earth today (see on 1:21,22), it follows there is no way for anyone today to receive such miraculous powers.

The entire significance of this event is that it is exceptional. It is not the normal or typical pattern of salvation. That is the entire point. These were the first Gentiles ever to be converted, and the Jews would never have been willing to teach them, baptize them, or accept them as converts under the gospel were it not for the amazing revelations and manifestations of the Spirit that we are studying. These things had to happen first, before the Gentiles were taught and baptized, else they never would have had the opportunity to be taught and baptized.

For a further discussion of whether this is Holy Spirit baptism and the consequences of it all, see notes on Acts 11:1-18, esp. verses 15-18.

10:47,48 – Peter then commanded Cornelius and his household to be baptized in water.

Peter responded to the events at hand by asking if anyone could refuse these people the right to be baptized in water, since they had received the Holy Spirit as well as Jews had. This was a rhetorical question. He proceeded to command them to be baptized in the name of Jesus.

It is clear that Peter used the coming of the Holy Spirit as proof Jesus would accept Gentiles and wanted them to be baptized. The necessary implication of his question in verse 47 is that, without such a convincing demonstration, Jews most certainly would have forbidden Gentiles to be baptized. Peter had seen a vision and had a revelation. Cornelius had an angel appear to him. The Jewish Christians no doubt were told all this. But when they for themselves saw the Spirit empower these people, that was the climaxing proof. Clearly the Gentiles could be saved by the gospel, and that meant they needed to be baptized. We today need no such miracles to convince us Gentiles can be converted: we have the clear record of Scripture. This confirms that such events as this are not needed now that we have the completed Bible.

Note that Peter was to tell Cornelius words whereby he could be saved (11:14) and the words he told them included the necessity to be baptized in water just as in other examples of conversion (2:38; 22:16). Water baptism is a necessary part of the gospel message of how to be saved. When it was clear that the Gentiles could be converted, it was immediately clear that they should be commanded to be baptized. No Christian in that day doubted that baptism was necessary to salvation.

Also note that baptism “in Jesus’ name” is water baptism, not Holy Spirit baptism. **After** they received the Holy Spirit, Peter commanded them to be baptized in Jesus’ name, and that was water baptism. Water baptism is done by human agents acting on behalf of or by the authority of Jesus (in His name). So, this is the baptism of the great commission that is essential to salvation (compare Matthew 28:18-20 to Mark 16:15,16). Holy Spirit baptism came directly from heaven without human agents; so it was done **by** Jesus, not by human agents acting “in His name.” Holy Spirit baptism is not the baptism of the great commission and is not necessary to salvation. In this case, however, Holy Spirit baptism was necessary to convince the Jews that Gentiles could be saved.

The story continued in chapter 11, as Peter was called in question for his involvement in this event.

Acts 11

11:1-18 - Peter's Defense to Jewish Brethren

11:1-3 – Jewish Christians in Jerusalem confronted Peter about the conversion of Gentiles.

Sometime later (we are not told exactly when) Peter went to Jerusalem. There certain Jewish Christians confronted him and debated with him. They had heard that he had associated with and eaten with uncircumcised Gentiles, and in fact these Gentiles had received the word of God. As 10:28 stated, this was contrary to Jewish practice, and these Jews apparently assumed the old practices should continue under the gospel. This entire situation shows exactly why the miraculous events of chapter 10 had to occur: Jewish Christians simply would not have accepted the conversion of the Gentiles without such evidence.

The account describes the conversion of Cornelius' household by saying the Gentiles had "received the word of God." This shows that receiving the word of God is an expression for the whole of conversion, including faith, repentance, and baptism. One does not receive the word of God simply by hearing it, or even by believing it. He must respond with proper obedience.

Note that all that follows here constitutes Peter's defense of his conduct. He sought to prove that Gentiles could receive the gospel equally with Jews. To establish this conclusion he retold the whole story of chapter 10, emphasizing the parts that prove God had revealed this to him.

Note again that, though God had revealed this, people had to study the revelation in order to understand and apply it properly. In particular, God expected the other Jewish Christians to draw the necessary inferences (logical conclusions) from the revelations the same as Peter had. God did not directly state the proper conclusions until the people drew the conclusions from the evidence. And the other Christians were expected by God to draw, by necessary inference, the very same conclusions as Peter had. Furthermore, they would be opposing God if they did not so conclude (see verses 17,18). This shows again the power of necessary implication as a means by which God reveals His will.

Also, note that here is another example (compare chapter 6) in which members of the church, even leaders in the church, disagreed with one another. This is not a new situation. But how did they deal with the problem? Did they ignore it, refuse to discuss it, agree to disagree, or say it did not matter so everyone could just believe as he pleased? No, they

confronted one another, discussed the matter, and let Divine revelation settle it. We must do likewise. (Compare chapter 15.)

Then note how this situation is unlike what we should expect if the early church believed Peter to be an infallible Pope, the head of the church on earth. Instead, he is simply viewed as one who might be wrong and needed to be confronted the same as anyone else who might be wrong. What convinced the people Peter was right was, not the fact He told them what they must accept, but the evidence He gave them that God had revealed this, and that evidence was confirmed by the men who went with him.

11:4-10 – Peter summarized the vision he had received.

Peter's evidence, in response to the Jewish Christians who questioned him, contained four separate items of revelation given by God. The first was the vision of unclean animals. He restated it just as in 10:9-16 (see notes there). Note that he did not state any conclusion from this but continued to give the rest of his evidence.

11:11,12 – Peter then described the message of the Spirit telling him to go with the messengers sent from Cornelius.

The second of Peter's proofs was the revelation from the Spirit telling him to have no doubts but to go with the men who had been sent to bring him to Cornelius. The clear intent of the Spirit was that Peter was to go to the house of a Gentile. This showed the brethren questioning Peter that, when he did the thing they were questioning, it was as an act of obedience to a direct command from the Spirit. See notes on 10:17-20. He "went in to uncircumcised men" (verse 3) because the Spirit expressly told him to do so without doubting.

He also mentioned the other Jewish Christians who accompanied him (here we are told there were six of them). These men served as witness to substantiate what happened.

11:13,14 – Peter then told about the angel who told Cornelius to send for Peter to tell him how to be saved.

Peter's third proof was that an angel had appeared to Cornelius himself telling him to send for Peter and that Peter would tell him words whereby Cornelius and his household could be saved. Again, this confirmed that God wanted Peter to go to Cornelius and teach him. It also confirmed that Cornelius could be saved. But salvation comes only by obedient belief in Christ that includes repentance, confession, and baptism. So, it followed that God wanted Cornelius to be given the opportunity to fully learn and obey the gospel.

Here we see why the hearing of the gospel is so important. It is essential for one to be taught the gospel to be saved (see John 6:44,45; Romans 10:14-17; 1:16; Mark 16:15; etc.). Further, it is God's will for that

message to be delivered through human agents, not for God to give it to men directly by miraculous revelation to the sinner himself.

The hearing of the gospel is necessary to salvation. Those unwilling to listen cannot be saved. There will be no other means to know the truth.

11:15,16 – Then Peter told about the coming of the Holy Spirit on Cornelius.

Peter’s fourth and final proof that God wanted him to associate with, preach to, and baptize Gentiles was the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them. He said this happened as he began to speak (i.e., early in his message – Acts 10 shows he had taught them some things when this event happened).

It came upon them “as upon us at the beginning.” This surely means that the coming of the Holy Spirit on Cornelius was like its coming on the apostles on Pentecost. It was the “same gift” (verse 17) as had been received by Peter and the apostles (compare verse 1). Note that Peter had to go all the way back to “the beginning” to find something comparable to what happened to Cornelius. Why would this be so if, as some claim, Holy Spirit baptism was a regular experience that all or most Christians should receive? In all the New Testament these two events are the only ones that are described as being “like” this.

When this happened, Peter remembered the promise of Jesus that people would be baptized in the Holy Spirit, in contrast to John’s baptism in water. Jesus had repeated this promise in 1:5, speaking to the apostles. Why would Peter quote this unless he is here saying that this promise was also fulfilled upon Cornelius? Surely, the natural conclusion here is that Cornelius’ household also received Holy Spirit baptism as the apostles had on Pentecost.

So, we have two occasions, and only two, recorded in the Scriptures that can be proved to be Holy Spirit baptism. It came on the apostles in Acts 2 when the gospel was first preached to the Jews. It came on Cornelius’ household in Acts 10 when the gospel was first preached to the Gentiles. In both cases, it served special unique purposes that are not needed today. It was a temporary event, unique to the infancy of the church, which is not needed and not repeated today.

Some claim Cornelius did not receive Holy Spirit baptism.

The only possible arguments for this view are: (1) The promise was addressed only to the apostles (1:2-5). But if further revelation teaches us that others did receive it, who are we to oppose it? This is simply a matter of additional revelation, which we must take in connection with previous information. Nor does this in any way weaken the argument that Holy Spirit baptism is not for today. It was still obviously a rare event, limited to only a few people, happening only on very unique occasions, not needed and so not repeated today.

(2) Cornelius could not have received **all** the same gifts as the apostles did. True, but why must we conclude that Holy Spirit baptism necessarily conferred all the gifts? The apostles received all the gifts because as apostles they would need them. Cornelius would not need them all. He would need only enough to prove the point God wanted to prove: that Gentiles could be saved.

We conclude that Cornelius' household received two baptisms: water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism. But by the time Ephesians 4:4-6 was written there was only one baptism. One or the other had ceased. Since water baptism is essential to salvation for all men (compare Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16), it follows that it must continue throughout all ages. Holy Spirit baptism gave spiritual gifts that were temporary in nature (compare 1 Corinthians 13:8-11). Therefore, it is reasonable that it is the baptism that ceased.

Further, note that the "tongues" spoken by Cornelius must have been similar in nature to those spoken by the apostles in Acts 2. They were part of the "same gift." If so, they too would have been languages the speakers had never learned (see notes on Acts 2:5ff).

11:17,18 – All who were present concluded that God had granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life.

Having itemized his four proofs, all of them involving direct manifestations from God, Peter reached his conclusion. Remember that the purposes of spiritual gifts were to reveal God's will and confirm it. The evidence Peter gave served both purposes. God's will was clear and Peter could not withstand it. The other Jewish Christians also were forced to the same conclusion and could not speak against it: God had granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life. The Gentiles could also repent and receive eternal life according to the gospel (compare chapter 15).

Note that here is the clear statement of the purpose of all these revelations, including the Holy Spirit baptism.

They were to prove to Jews and to all Christians that Gentiles could be saved according to the gospel. There was no intent to prove that all people could receive Holy Spirit baptism, nor that unsaved people could generally receive spiritual gifts. This was a special, exceptional case.

Furthermore, note that these Christians were able to reach the proper conclusion about the conversion of Gentiles, based on the report of the witnesses who had been there and had seen what happened. They did not need to personally receive or see further miraculous proofs to convince them. They were convinced on the basis of the evidence that miracles confirmed the event when it happened. This demonstrates that, once a doctrine or teaching has been revealed and confirmed by miracles, it does not need repeated miraculous confirmation throughout history to convince people to believe it. In short, we do not need miracles

today to confirm this truth, just like these Jewish Christians did not need further miracles to confirm that truth.

God had a specific, unique point to prove. Once He had made that point, there was no need to repeat the revelations and evidence today. We now have the truth about this matter stated here in the Scriptures. In order to convince you that the Gentiles can be saved according to the gospel, do you need more proof than you find in the Scriptures? I know of no one today who would claim to need to personally experience Holy Spirit baptism or miracles to know this to be true. If further evidence is not needed to prove this point, then why argue from this example that Holy Spirit baptism or miracles are for today?

But the same is true of all truth, for all was revealed and confirmed in the first century and then written down in Scripture. If we can understand why we do not need miracles or Holy Spirit baptism today to confirm the truth which those events confirmed here in Acts 10,11, then we should be able to understand why we do not need miraculous revelation or miraculous confirmation for any truth today. Miracles have completely accomplished their purpose and therefore have ceased.

For further discussion of Holy Spirit baptism and miracles for today, see our articles on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

God granted them repentance unto life.

This is interesting language: Surely anyone can see that God did not compel them against their will to repent. The whole point of the context is that they had to hear the gospel so they would know what they needed to do to be saved. When they learned the gospel, they chose of their own free will to obey. God granted them repentance by granting them the opportunity to learn and to obey if they so chose. Other passages that talk about God ordaining people to life or granting them life, etc., should be understood similarly. None of them mean God sends the Holy Spirit directly into people's hearts to compel them "irresistibly" to serve God, as Calvinism teaches. Instead, they simply mean that God gave people the opportunity to learn and respond if they so chose.

And further, note that the whole conversion experience is summarized by the term "repentance." Nothing is mentioned here about faith, let alone about baptism. Yet, we know for a fact that these things were involved in the conversion here. It would be a mistake to conclude that, since repentance is mentioned but faith is not, then faith is not necessary to salvation. Instead, we conclude that repentance stands for the whole conversion experience – other details are given elsewhere.

But the same is true when passages say we are saved by faith but do not mention repentance or baptism, etc. (see on 10:43). It would be a mistake to conclude that, since faith is mentioned but repentance is not, then repentance is not necessary to salvation. Likewise, it would be a mistake to conclude that, since faith is mentioned but baptism is not,

then baptism is not necessary to salvation. Instead, we conclude that faith stands for the whole conversion experience. Additional information is given elsewhere, and when we learn that information we understand that repentance, confession, and baptism are all essential to salvation.

This is a clear instance of “necessary inference.”

Note that, on considering the evidence of God’s revelation, all the people reached the same conclusion. The conclusion necessarily followed from the evidence, but was not directly stated in any of it. Yet the people all drew the same conclusion, that conclusion was binding, and is in fact essential to our salvation. Any who disagreed would have been withstanding God! To argue, as some today do, that conclusions are not binding on us if they are not directly stated in Scripture, is to ignore such powerful examples as this one (and many others).

Finally, note that we have examined another example of conversion (see chart). These people heard the gospel (10:22,33-48; 11:14,15), believed it (10:43), repented (11:18), and obeyed God (10:34,35) by being baptized in water (10:47,48).

The Beginnings of the Church in Antioch – 11:19-30

11:19-26 - The Spread of the Gospel in Antioch

11:19 – Scattered disciples preached as far as Antioch and Cyprus.

At this point, the direction of the book of Acts makes a dramatic change. In Acts 1:8 Jesus had said the gospel would be preached in Jerusalem (fulfilled in chapter 1-7), Judea and Samaria (fulfilled in 8-11), and then to the uttermost parts of the earth. In chapter 13, the gospel begins to be spread to the “uttermost parts of the earth.” Chapter 11 and 12 describe a transition period in which events set the stage for the last part of Jesus’ prediction. The conversion of Gentiles (Cornelius) was necessary to make this last step possible.

In this stage of the spread of the gospel, the focus switched from the church in Jerusalem and its work, to the church in Antioch (of Syria) and its work. The immediate context here records the beginning of that church and its early growth.

The story returns to describe some of the people who fled from Jerusalem as a result of the stoning of Stephen and the subsequent persecution (see 8:1-4). The disciples, having been so scattered, traveled as far as the country of Phoenicia (modern Lebanon), the island of Cyprus, and

the city of Antioch of Syria (see **map**). At first in their preaching they spoke only to Jews.

11:20,21 – The gospel spread to Hellenists in Antioch.

But some of the teachers were from Cyprus and Cyrene. The latter was a city in Libya of Africa, west of Egypt (see **map**). Some such people had been present at Pentecost to hear that first gospel sermon (2:10). These people preached the gospel to Hellenists in Antioch.

“Hellenists” (ASV “Greeks”) is a word generally used to refer to Greek-speaking Jews (compare 6:1 – see notes there). But here it seems to me it must mean Gentiles (in contrast to the Jews of verse 19). Otherwise, what is the point is specifically mentioning them? If these disciples were doing the same thing as those mentioned in verse 19, why mention them? And what would be noteworthy about preaching to Greek-speaking Jews, since that had been done since the beginning? Apparently, these disciples had heard about Cornelius’ conversion and immediately began preaching to Gentiles, in contrast to those in verse 19 who spoke to Jews only.

The result was also dramatic. The Lord blessed their work and many believed and turned to the Lord. Note the difference here between believing and turning to the Lord. Turning to the Lord refers to conversion or a change that follows repentance (Acts 3:19; Isaiah 55:6,7; Acts 2:38; 26:20; 15:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:9). This turning came after belief and was a result of it. In some places (see on 10:43), faith is a generic term including the whole conversion. But it is possible to have a form of belief in Jesus and yet not turn to Him (be converted), as in John 12:42,42; James 2:19. So, faith (as in this case) sometimes refers only to the conviction that must be followed by a response that completes the conversion. A true, saving faith leads to obedience, resulting in a Scriptural conversion.

11:22 – The Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to Antioch.

The news of these conversions came to the church in Jerusalem. They sent Barnabas to go to Antioch.

Note that this is an authorized work for a church to do. Local churches can send preachers out into new areas to preach the gospel, including sending men to preach to other churches (this, of course, would require the agreement, and hence the cooperation, of the church to whom the man was sent).

In doing this work the Jerusalem church was not a “mother church” or “sponsoring church,” as some practice today. Jerusalem did not ask for funds from other churches to do this work. Nor was a “missionary society” set up as an institution apart from the churches and asking funds from the churches. The Jerusalem church just did her own work with the resources she had available. Antioch itself later did the same thing when she became able (13:1ff). Likewise today, any church that

sees a need for the gospel to be preached in an area, if it has teachers it can spare, may and should send those men to preach in that area.

We have read of Barnabas in 4:36,37. He was among those who sold property to help the needy in Jerusalem. He was of the tribe of Levi and was a native of Cyprus. This would likely have helped him fit in with the work in Antioch, since people from Cyprus and Cyrene had begun it. His name had originally been Joseph, but had been changed by the apostles to Barnabas, meaning “son of exhortation” (or “consolation”). This shows that by nature he would be good at the work of exhorting and consoling, as was needed in Antioch. We also read about him in 9:26ff when he told the church in Jerusalem about Saul’s conversion.

Note the need for continued teaching of new converts. Far too often Christians make that mistake of neglecting to teach people after conversion to ground them in the faith. Here as elsewhere in Acts, faithful teachers show that further teaching is needed (Matthew 28:20).

11:23 – Barnabas encouraged the Antioch Christians to continue serving God.

Having arrived at Antioch, Barnabas was encouraged by the progress in the work there. The grace of God can be seen, not directly of course, but indirectly in its effects (like the wind). God’s grace forgives sins, removing the burden of guilt, and making men faithful servants of God. Barnabas saw such results among the disciples in Antioch.

Being the “son of exhortation,” he then began to exhort or encourage them to continue serving the Lord with purpose of heart. Such exhortation is needed for all Christians, especially new converts.

“Purpose” means a fixed resolution. Men do not serve God by accident. We must make the resolution to turn from sin and serve Him (repentance), then we must follow through and maintain that commitment (compare 2 Timothy 3:10). These people, like all of us, had to make this resolution before they became Christians. Barnabas then encouraged them to continue in it.

It is possible for God’s people to cease cleaving to Him, else Barnabas would not have had to exhort them to continue serving Him (compare Acts 8:11-23; James 5:19,20; 1 Timothy 1:19; 2 Timothy 2:17,18; Galatians 5:4; John 6:66; etc.). Problems in this world cannot separate us from God unless we let them do so (Romans 8:35-39; John 10:28,29). But if we allow ourselves to go into sin, our sins will separate us from God (see also Isaiah 59:1,2). Therefore, if we are to continue in the Lord, we must be resolved to avoid sin and turn from it so we may maintain our fellowship with God.

11:24 – Barnabas was a good man and many were added to the Lord.

Note the qualities Barnabas possessed that were useful to him in working for the Lord.

The same qualities are important for any preacher to possess, and for all of us as Christians.

He was “a good man.” “Good” can only be defined in terms of God’s will for us (2 Timothy 3:16,17). Barnabas was what God’s word instructed him to be (reverent, obedient to God, a good moral man, sound in the faith, dedicated to the spread of the gospel, etc.).

“Full of the Holy Spirit” –The Holy Spirit indwells every Christian (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; Acts 5:32; Romans 8:9; etc.). This refers to the fellowship we have with the Holy Spirit and the blessings we receive as a result (compare John 17:20,21; 2 Corinthians 13:14).

The Spirit also fills us in that the Spirit gave the word that instructs us how the Spirit wants us to live to produce the fruits of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17; 5:18,19; Colossians 3:16; 1:9; Galatians 5:22-24; Romans 15:14.).

Barnabas was no doubt filled with the Spirit in both these senses, and perhaps also in that he possessed miraculous powers of the Spirit (Acts 2:4; 6:5; 13:1).

“Full of faith” – He possessed a strong conviction about God and His Son Jesus. Faith is essential for all of us to even become disciples (John 8:24; Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6). But the faith we possess is a matter of degree, so it can be small or great (2 Thessalonians 1:3; Matthew 14:31; 8:10). Barnabas was full of faith. He had great faith, which leads to great work for the Lord (James 2:14-26).

Wouldn’t it be wonderful for all of us if the Lord could describe us this way?

The description is also noteworthy for what it does not say.

It does not praise Barnabas for his educational achievements and his degrees, nor for his oratorical abilities and eloquence, nor for his people-pleasing personality, nor for his social standing and his influence with people in high places, etc. In short, these things were not what God thought was important when He looked at Barnabas. The work prospered in Barnabas’ hands because of these spiritual qualities, and this is what was important to God. It should likewise be what is important to us when we evaluate a man and consider who we want to have work with the local church.

The result of the work of Barnabas and the church was that many more people were added to the Lord (compare 2:47; 5:14; etc.) When a church works hard together with a devoted preacher who works hard,

the Lord's work can be accomplished. Whether many or few respond favorably will depend on the hearts of the hearers, but at least the Lord's people will accomplish what He desires.

11:25,26 – Barnabas brought Saul to help in the work. So for a year they assembled with the church and taught many people. Disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

As the work progressed, Barnabas apparently decided it would be useful to have help. He had known Saul previously, having been the one who explained to the church in Jerusalem about Saul's conversion so the church would accept Saul (9:26ff). Barnabas decided Saul could help in the work. Saul had, however, fled Jerusalem to go to Tarsus because of threats against his life (9:29,30). So, Barnabas went to Tarsus to get Saul and brought him to Antioch to help in the work. This began a productive association in the Lord's work which lasted many years.

For a period of a whole year these men continued in Antioch assembling with the church, resulting in a great many people being taught. The work of the church in conducting assemblies is not limited to meeting on the first day of the week to have the Lord's Supper and the collection. The church also assembles to teach members and non-members. This purpose for assembling may be accomplished on any day of the week. Likewise today, faithful churches should assemble for this purpose, and "good men" like Barnabas and Saul (verse 24) will attend so they can encourage people in learning the truth. Here is approved example authorizing churches today to assemble to teach and showing members the value of attending those meetings.

The first use of the name "Christian"

The disciples in Antioch were for the first time referred to by a new name, "Christian." Disciples are followers, learners of the Lord (compare John 8:31). "Christian" is used only two other places in the Bible: Acts 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16. It is simply another term for those who adhere to or follow Christ and so are Christ-like.

The verse does not directly say who first used the word, only that it was first used here. But the word for "called" refers to a divine communication (see Matthew 2:12,22; Luke 2:26; Acts 10:22; Romans 7:3; Hebrews 8:5; 11:7; 12:25). Every instance of its use refers to that which God has revealed (or at least harmonizes with His revelation). It is most likely, therefore, that God originated the word; but if not, it is still true that both God and the Christians themselves clearly approved of the name (compare 1 Peter 4:16). Isaiah 62:2 had prophesied a new name for God's people. No other name fulfills the prophecy so well nor describes God's people so well.

Note, however, that this was not a denominational label. There were no denominations then, only the one true church which Jesus had built (Matthew 16:18), bought with His blood (Acts 20:28), and to which He

adds all saved people (Acts 2:47; Ephesians 5:23,25). The members of this church are called Christians. So, we today should not be members of man-made denominations and should not wear denominational names which are not found in the Bible. Names matter, whether they are authorized names or unauthorized names invented by men. In particular, Christians should call ourselves by terms we can find in Scripture, not exalting men or doctrines or factions (1 Corinthians 1:10-13). We should just be Christians as were Jesus' disciples in Antioch.

Further, the passage definitely states that the word was *first* used in Antioch, not before and not after. So, the Book of Mormon must be wrong when it says the word was used in America in 73 BC (Alma 46:13-16; 48:10). Nor should we believe that it was *first* used in the 14th or 15th century (as a Harvard scholar told a friend of mine) or anytime or place other than Antioch in the first century.

11:27-30 - Care for the Needy Saints in Judea

11:27,28 – Agabus prophesied a famine in the whole world.

Certain prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch about this time. Note that preachers from one church would visit other churches and teach in those days even as often occurs today.

One of these teachers was named Agabus (see also 21:10). He prophesied the coming of a famine over all the world, and this came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. As in all famines, though, certain people in certain areas are harder hit than others. By some means that we are not told, the Antioch brethren knew the Judean brethren would have special need. Perhaps this was in the prophecy. Perhaps they knew simply because the churches there had so much need in the past that it was known they were already struggling (compare 2:44-46; 4:32-5:11; 6:1-6).

11:29 – The Antioch disciples, according to their ability, sent relief to the brethren in Judea.

Knowing of the problem, the Antioch disciples determined to do something to help the needy in Judea. Note these points:

(1) Early Christians were generous and benevolent to those in need. This had been the case in Jerusalem (see the verses listed above), and was the case also in Antioch.

(2) The “disciples” sent this relief. Other such instances indicate that disciples did this kind of work as a church (compare 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8,9; etc.). This is almost surely also the case here since the money was obviously pooled and carried at one time by two men to the places where needed (verse 30). Further, it was taken to the elders of the churches, implying that at least the distribution of it was done on a congregational level.

(3) Every man gave according to his ability and as he determined. This is exactly the pattern shown elsewhere regarding contributions to

finance church works (compare 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; Acts 5:4; 2 Corinthians 9:6,7; etc.). The gospel nowhere states a fixed amount or percent people must give. Offerings were always free-will gifts in which each member decided for himself how much to give. Each gave an amount greater or less, depending on individual ability and prosperity.

(4) The people aided were “brethren.” No New Testament church ever sent a contribution to needy people outside the church (see the references above). Individual Christians, as they have ability and opportunity, however, should help any they meet who have needs. This keeps the church free to concentrate its efforts on men’s spiritual needs.

(5) The fact it was sent to elders (verse 30), who are the overseers of the local churches (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-3) indicates the money was sent to the churches where the needy people were members. So we have here an example of local church cooperation in which one church sent contributions directly to other churches.

The New Testament pattern is for each church to function independently from others, each financing and overseeing its own work under its own officers (Acts 6:1-6; 14:23; 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-3). Contributions were sent from one church to another only when the receiving church had an emergency in which there were needy members in its midst which the local church was unable to provide for. Then contributions could be sent from other churches only for the purpose of relieving that need, on a temporary basis till the need was relieved. This plan maintained the independence and equality of the churches.

Never in the Bible did the churches establish nor contribute to a centralized organizational board of directors or sponsoring church elders to oversee and maintain an ongoing program of benevolent or evangelistic work on behalf of many congregations. Such arrangements have been begun in recent years, but they result in a shift of responsibility from the local churches to the centralized board or elders. The responsibility for supervising the work should be on the level of the local churches where God put it (see the references above, esp. 2 Corinthians 8:13-15).

11:30 – Barnabas and Saul carried the funds to elders of the churches in Judea.

The funds thus collected in Antioch were then sent on to the elders in Judea by means of messengers (Barnabas and Saul). Note here:

(1) This is the first mention of elders in the New Testament, though it is obvious that they had existed for some time. Other passages later show us that this is a work or office in each local church (Acts 14:23). It is the same position or office that is also called “bishops” or “pastors” (Acts 20:17,28; 1 Peter 5:1-3). Men were appointed to serve in the position only when they possessed specific qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). And a plurality was always appointed in each church (Acts 14:23). Their work was to oversee or supervise the work of the local church, watch for the souls of the members, teach the truth, and guard

against false teachers (Acts 20:28-30; 1 Peter 5:1-3; Hebrews 13:7,17; 1 Timothy 5:17; 3:2; Titus 1:9-14). We will learn more as we read their work later in Acts.

(2) There were at this time several churches in Judea. There was Jerusalem (11:2; etc.), Lydda (9:32,35), Joppa (9:36,42ff), Sharon (9:35), and Caesarea (10:1ff; 8:40). The New Testament expressly states there were churches plural in Judea (1 Thessalonians 2:14; Galatians 1:22; compare Acts 9:31:8:1).

(3) Since each local church is to have its own elders (if men are qualified), each church in Judea would have had its own elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5ff; etc.).

(4) The fact this aid was sent to the elders shows that the men in that position had the ultimate responsibility for distributing the money to the needy members. This responsibility may not Scripturally be shifted to the board of directors of some man-made institution such as an orphan or widow home.

(5) Since each eldership has oversight of just one local church (the one where they are members – Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-3), and since each church should have its own elders, there must not be a centralized eldership that oversees the distribution of money on behalf of many churches. Men within each local church are to be responsible to see that the funds are properly distributed according to the needs of the members of that local church (Acts 6:1-6).

All this demonstrates that, contrary to the claim of some modern members, the money from Antioch was not sent to Jerusalem to supervise the distribution to other churches, as is done in sponsoring churches. Jerusalem was just one of the churches in Judea. The money went to the elders, and each church would have its own elders and would supervise its own work under its own elders. The fact Saul and Barnabas later returned from Jerusalem (12:25) does not prove that was the only place they went and cannot be used to offset the clear teaching elsewhere regarding congregational independence (as described above).

For further discussion of the organization, work, and co-operation of local churches, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

Acts 12

The Arrest and Miraculous Release of Peter – Chapter 12

12:1-5 - The Death of James and Arrest of Peter

12:1 – Persecution began in Judea, led by King Herod.

The account here passes from events in Antioch and returns to Judea, almost certainly to Jerusalem. The church there had been free from persecution for some time since the conversion of Saul and his flight from Jerusalem to Tarsus (9:31). Here we are told that persecution began again, this time instigated by Herod the king.

Herod was the family name of, not one, but a series of related rulers in Palestine (like Pharaohs in Egypt, Caesars in Rome, etc.). Herod the Great ruled when Jesus was born (Matthew 2:1-18). He was succeeded in Judea (but not all of Palestine) by Archelaus (Matthew 2:22). Those rulers were, of course, subject to Rome, who at the time of Jesus' birth was ruled by Augustus Caesar (Luke 2:1).

Herod the Great rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem (John 2:20). Antipas (also called Antipater) ruled in Galilee following the death of Herod the Great. He was the Herod who killed John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-12). He was also the Herod before whom Jesus was tried (Luke 23:5-12). Following Antipas, Galilee was ruled by Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great. He was finally granted rule of all Palestine by Claudius Caesar (Acts 11:28). This is the Herod described here in Acts 12 (*Zondervan's Pictorial Bible Dictionary*).

12:2 – Herod killed James, the brother of John.

Herod's persecution led him to kill James, who was the brother of John and the son of Zebedee. This distinguishes him from other men named James (see verse 17). He was one of the first apostles chosen by Jesus and had been a close associate of Jesus during His ministry (see Matthew 4:21,22; 17:1; 26:36,37; etc.). He and his brother John had requested to rule with Jesus in His kingdom. He had then affirmed that he could drink the cup and receive the baptism of Jesus. He surely did so at this time (compare Matthew 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-40).

James is the first apostle whose death is recorded. Secular history tells us that all the others also died by persecution except James' brother John (but he also suffered great persecution and died in prison).

Imagine the severe effect this death must have had on the church. Even today it is so sad to think of such a great man, so close to our Lord, who died for His Savior. Yet, note how briefly and factually Luke records such a major event.

Although James was slain, we will see later that Peter miraculously escaped from Herod's attempt to slay him. We may wonder why God chose to deliver one apostle but not the other. We will likely never know on earth the answer to such questions, but God must have His reasons. He knows better than we do what will or will not forward His purpose on earth. We must simply realize that such differences will still exist today between those whom he chooses to deliver from hardship and those whom He allows to continue to suffer.

12:3 – Having slain James, Herod then imprisoned Peter.

The Jews were evidently pleased at the death of James, and Herod wanted to please them, so he proceeded to also arrest Peter. Evil people are often emboldened in their sins by other evil people.

This happened during a Jewish feast, the Days of Unleavened Bread. This is a clear reference to the feast of the Passover. See notes on Matthew 26:17,18ff; compare Exodus 12.

Many Jews would attend this feast in Jerusalem, so Herod's act against the church would please those Jews who had gathered.

12:4 – Herod placed Peter in prison, guarded by four squads of soldiers till after the Passover.

The description of the security measures Herod took is important because it helps us to appreciate the magnitude of the miracle that occurred subsequently.

Peter was (1) imprisoned, (2) guarded by four squads of soldiers, (3) verse 6 adds that he was bound with two chains, (4) he slept between two soldiers, while others guarded the door, (5) guards are also described further (though it is unclear whether it was the same ones mentioned here or others) and then an iron gate (verse 10). A "squad" (quaternion – ASV) was composed of four soldiers. Since the night was divided into four 3-hour watches, and there were four squads, it is reasonable that one squad stood guard at a time, taking turns by watch through the night.

Herod's intent was to bring Peter before the people after the Passover. This would be similar to Jesus' death (Matthew 26:17ff; 27:11-26; etc.).

Notes on the KJV use of the word "Easter"

The KJV here uses the word "Easter." However, the reference is unquestionably to the Jewish feast of the Passover and should never be

taken to refer to any “Christian” holy day celebrating Jesus’ resurrection. Virtually all Bible scholars agree with this conclusion because of the following overwhelming evidence:

(1) All modern translations say “Passover.”

(2) The original word is *πασχα* which is always without exception elsewhere translated “Passover,” even in the KJV (see also Vine on “Easter”).

(3) Verse 3 refers to the Jews and the Days of Unleavened Bread. This was undeniably a Jewish feast associated with the Passover. So, the context shows the word here refers to the Passover.

(4) Nothing in any way connects Christians with the day as though it was a Christian holy day.

(5) If the term here referred to a Christian holy day, what reason would Herod have to wait till it was over to execute Peter? Executing an apostle during a Christian holy day would accomplish Herod’s purpose more emphatically. But if the reference was to a Jewish holy day, it would make sense to wait so as to avoid offending those whom he sought to please (verse 3).

Though Jesus died on the Jewish Passover so that our sins could be passed over (1 Corinthians 5:7), nevertheless this was not the day when He was raised. In fact, there is no authority anywhere in the Scriptures for any annual observance of His resurrection as is observed by some today. Christians instead remembered Jesus’ death on the first day of every week in the Lord’s Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11; compare 16:1,2).

The modern concept of an annual feast day to commemorate Jesus’ resurrection is a human tradition that originated when the apostate Catholic Church chose to make compromises with Judaism and paganism. The Jews kept the Passover about this time of year, and the heathen Romans worshiped a pagan goddess then. The Roman church, in order to compete with these festivals and to satisfy “converts” from paganism, adopted without Bible authority an annual feast at this time of year to remember Jesus’ resurrection (see Vine, encyclopedias, etc.). This in turn was later adopted by other Protestant denominations that came out of Catholicism.

Christians are warned against keeping special holy days, including those carried over from Judaism (Colossians 2:14-17; Galatians 4:8-11).

For further discussion of the observance of holy days, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

12:5 – As Peter was in prison, the Christians continually prayed on his behalf.

Surely, the death of James would have led the disciples to see the need to pray for Peter. No doubt they prayed, if it be God’s will, that Peter’s life could be spared and he could be freed (see also Romans 15:30-

32; Ephesians 6:18-20; James 5:13-18). Their prayers were “constant,” as ours would no doubt be if we were in their place. We today should likewise pray for one another in time of trouble, especially spiritual hardship.

Note that, even when they were being killed for the cause of Christ, Christians used no force or violence in their own defense. They fled if necessary (Acts 8), and they prayed for God’s help. But they never sought to harm those who persecuted them.

12:6-19 - Peter’s Miraculous Release

12:6 – Peter slept that night chained between soldiers with guards outside the door.

As mentioned before, Peter was bound by two chains, sleeping at night between two soldiers and other guards before the door (see verse 4). His miraculous deliverance occurred on the very night before Herod planned to bring him out (presumably to kill him as he had James or at least for further persecution). The story here is as exciting and interesting as any fiction, yet Luke tells it calmly and factually.

12:7-9 – An angel awoke Peter and told him to get dressed and follow.

Suddenly, in the midst of the night, a light shone in the prison and an angel stood by Peter. He struck Peter and told him to get up. Then Peter’s chains fell off his hands. It is interesting that, in prison on the very night before his impending execution, Peter slept so soundly he had to be forcibly awakened.

The angel told Peter to dress himself. He was to gird himself (put on a leather belt), put on his sandals, and put his outer garment around himself. Then he was to follow the angel.

Peter obeyed, following the angel, but not realizing it was all real. He thought it was a vision he was seeing. Imagine being in Peter’s position and having this happen. It is not surprising one would have doubts about the reality of it.

12:10 – They walked past the guards and through the gate, that opened by itself.

They passed the guards who, for some reason, made no effort to stop them. It could be they had been put in a trance or otherwise rendered powerless. It is unclear whether these were the same two groups of guards mentioned in verse 4 or still other guards further outside.

They finally came to the iron gate that led to the city, which opened to them by itself. They went out into the city and the angel left Peter there alone.

What an incredible account! Yet again Luke tells it calmly and briefly almost as an everyday occurrence.

12:11 – Peter came to himself, realizing what had really happened.

He understood it was no vision (verse 9), but the Lord had sent an angel to deliver him from Herod and from the expectation (intents, desires) of the Jews.

Other accounts of God's servants being miraculously delivered from prison are Acts 5:17-25; 16:19-34. However, God's prophets were not always freed (Acts 4:2; chapter 7; Matthew 27; etc.). Apparently, it sometimes suits God's purposes to free His servants, but at other times He allows them to be imprisoned and even slain.

12:12 – After some consideration, Peter went to the house of Mary, mother of John Mark.

Mark is referred to again in 12:25 where we are told that he returned with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch from Jerusalem. Later he started with them on their first preaching trip (13:5) but left them and returned (13:13). Still later, this became the occasion of a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas (15:36-40). Eventually he proved his worth to Paul in the work (2 Timothy 4:11). He was related to Barnabas (Colossians 4:10). He is also recognized as the author of the account of Jesus' life that wears his name.

Mary's home was one place where some people had gathered praying, presumably on Peter's behalf (verse 5). This was where Peter chose to go, apparently knowing he could find some Christians there. Note that Christians in that day did have houses. Neither Acts 2 & 4 nor any other gospel passages are intended to prove that it is wrong for Christians to own personal property.

It is interesting that these people were praying at night, and it was at least late enough that Peter had been asleep in the jail (verse 6) and lights were needed (verse 7).

12:13-15 – The people refused to believe Rhoda, who announced to them Peter's arrival.

When Peter arrived, he knocked at the door of the gate (the door to the front porch or vestibule area that gave admission to the courtyard). The knock was answered by a maid named Rhoda. She recognized Peter's voice and became so excited in her gladness that, instead of letting him in, she ran in and told everybody that Peter was at the gate. Such little details are so true to life that, not only do they add interest, but they also confirm the truthfulness of the account.

The other members, however, so disbelieved her that they said she was beside herself (crazy). She continued to insist, so they suggested maybe it was his angel or spirit. It is unclear what they meant by this. Perhaps they thought people have ghosts that return to earth after death or that they become angels after death. In any case, it was an uninspired

opinion, so there is no reason to believe it is accurate (were the people correct when they said Rhoda was beside herself?).

It is interesting that the people were no doubt praying for Peter's delivery, but when it happened they did not at first believe the answer to their own prayer! This could indicate a lack of faith, but perhaps the event was so shocking and surprising that they did not know what to think. Had Herod held a hearing and decided to let him go, that may have been more what they were expecting, rather than a miraculous delivery in the night.

12:16,17 – Finally, Peter told them what had happened, then he left.

Peter, meantime, was still outside knocking. Finally, instead of arguing about it, the disciples went to see for themselves, opened the door, and were amazed.

Peter, however, quieted the group and explained what had happened. Then he told them to report this to James and the brethren in general (obviously not all of the large congregation were present in the house). Then he went elsewhere, presumably for safety.

The James here mentioned could not be the brother of John, for he had been slain (verse 2). But he must have been a person of prominence in the church for Peter to expressly name him. The same man is referred to in 15:13; 21:13; 1 Corinthians 15:7; Galatians 1:19; 2:9,12. Perhaps it refers to James the brother of Jesus.

12:18,19 – Herod and the soldiers were amazed by Peter's disappearance. Herod had the guards put to death.

Next morning, as would be expected, there was quite a surprise for the soldiers. Peter was supposed to be put on trial that day, but instead the guards could not find him! Imagine being chained to a prisoner with other guards surrounding, and within a wall with an iron gate, only to wake up and find the prisoner gone!

When Herod searched for Peter and could not find him, he commanded the guards to be killed. This was often the penalty for losing a prisoner. In this case the guards were innocent. And Herod must have known there was no way Peter could have escaped by natural means without help from the guards and no motive at all for the guards to help. But if he did not punish them, that would be like admitting he knew a miracle had occurred. So he punished them probably mostly for the sake of appearances. Then he went to Caesarea.

12:20-25 - The Death of Herod

12:20,21 – Herod made a speech to the people of Tyre and Sidon with whom he had previously been angry.

We are here told a little more about this Herod who had dared to kill an apostle of the Lord and imprison another. He had, for some unstated reason, been upset with the people of Tyre and Sidon (see *map*). The people in those cities, however, wanted to make peace with him because they got their food from Herod's territories. So they befriended one of his aides named Blastus. On a particular day, Herod came in royal apparel and sat on his throne and made an oration to them. The Jewish historian Josephus confirmed the event here described. He stated that this speech was made on a festival in honor of the Caesar. Herod wore clothing made from silver threads so it shone in the sunlight. (See Stringer and McGarvey.)

12:22-24 – The people praised Herod as a god, but God slew him for failing to give glory to the true God.

In their zeal to please the king, the people unwittingly became the means of his death. They shouted that he spoke like a god, not a man. Obviously this was flattery, but such deification of civil rulers was common in that day. Caesars, for example, were often viewed as gods or at least they wanted to be so viewed in their heathen idol worship.

God, however, would have none of it. His angel struck Herod so he was eaten by worms and died. Such was the righteous punishment of the man who had killed the apostle James and imprisoned Peter, almost surely with intent to kill him too.

But the reason specifically stated for Herod's death was that he did not give glory to God. He allowed the people to treat him as if he were a god, not just a man. God has never allowed such (compare Acts 10:25,26; Matthew 4:10). Man must never be elevated to a position only God deserves.

Josephus' account of Herod's death substantially agrees with Luke's. He says that Herod lingered for five days in horrible pain because of the worms. (See Stringer and McGarvey. Josephus gives sufficient dates that Stringer concludes this was 44 AD.) Surely it is a valuable lesson to consider the vengeance of God on this evil man. Even today, God can work through natural laws to help His people and oppose His enemies, if it serves His purpose to do so. He will not always slay the enemies of truth, of course, but He can do so or defeat them in other ways when He chooses.

Again, after the defeat of this persecutor, the gospel was spread successfully. Multitudes of people were converted. So, whether in peace or in persecution, God cares for His people so they can accomplish His work.

12:25 – Barnabas and Saul returned with Mark to Antioch.

A wholly unrelated event is briefly recorded at this point. Paul and Barnabas, having completed their mission of carrying benevolence from Antioch to the churches of Judea, returned from Jerusalem (compare 11:29,30). With them was John Mark (see verse 12). This event ties more closely to the subsequent events in Acts 13 than it does to any event in Acts 12

Some people mistakenly argue that, since the messengers returned from Jerusalem, then they must have taken all the benevolent funds to Jerusalem. So, Jerusalem must have been the “sponsoring church” which was responsible as the central distributing church to disburse the funds from Antioch to all the Judean churches. Such “logic,” however, is clearly wishful thinking to bolster a position for which there is no convincing proof. If such puny evidence is the best they have to offer, their case must be weak indeed.

The money was for “the brethren that dwelt in Judea.” Judea was a region with many churches. Jerusalem was a particular city in Judea. It was only natural that Paul and Barnabas would go there sometime in the journey – in fact, it was necessary that they go there at some point to deliver the funds for that particular church. But that in no way proves it was the **only** place they visited or even the main place they visited. The most it proves is that it was the **last** place they visited. Someplace had to be the last place.

If we are told that a man traveled to Europe and returned from London, would that prove London was the only place he visited? Nonsense! Such a conclusion is neither stated here nor implied. It contradicts the clear teaching of other Scriptures that show local churches functioned independently. No one church served as a central organization for distributing the funds of many churches. Honest people will reject the concept.

For further discussion of church organization and cooperation, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

This ends the second major section of the book of Acts. The gospel had now been spread throughout Judea and Samaria. The stage is set for the spread of the gospel throughout “all the world” (Acts 1:8).

Part 3: Spread of the Gospel to the Uttermost Parts of the World – Acts 13-28

Acts 13

Paul's First Preaching Journey – 13:1-14:28

At this point in the record, the focus of attention shifts from Jerusalem to Antioch. The gospel had been spread throughout Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, as Jesus had said it would be (1:8). This work had focused on the efforts of the Jerusalem church. Now the message was about to go to the uttermost parts of the earth, and the story focuses on the work of Saul, who was sent from the Antioch church.

13:1-3 - Paul and Barnabas Sent Forth by the Church at Antioch

13:1 – Prophets and teachers in the Antioch church

Just as the Jerusalem church had several prophets (11:27), so the church in Antioch had several prophets and teachers. This included Barnabas and Saul (compare 11:19-30; 12:25). The rest of the men are nowhere else mentioned in the Scriptures. One of them, Manaen, had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch and might have been a person of some importance in that sense.

How these men in Antioch became prophets is not mentioned. Some of them, like Barnabas, had been in Jerusalem in association with the apostles and presumably received the Holy Spirit by the laying on of apostles' hands at that time. Saul had been called to be an apostle. In

Galatians 1 he argues at length that he did not receive his message from the apostles but by direct revelation from the Holy Spirit. How and when he received this miraculous manifestation we are not told (see notes on Acts 9).

We today do not need prophets, since the written word is now complete and the gift of prophecy has ceased (1 Corinthians 13). However, every church needs men and women that are qualified to teach God's word. It is not likely that this list names every teacher in the church, since all are supposed to teach to the extent of ability (8:4). But probably these were among the more active and experienced workers.

13:2,3 – Paul and Barnabas were chosen by the Holy Spirit for a special work.

As these prophets and teachers were working for the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit revealed that Barnabas and Saul should be separated for a special work. The others then fasted, prayed, laid hands on them, and sent them away.

By this revelation, the Holy Spirit called them to begin their first preaching journey. Whether this was also stated in the Spirit's message is not recorded, nor or we told which prophet received the message. In any case, it is clear that all who were involved understood the intent. The *New Testament Chronological Chart* states that this missionary trip began in 47 AD, about 17 years after the beginning of the church.

Some people claim that all preachers are to have a special call – similar to what Paul and Barnabas here received – to make them preachers. But this calling did not make Barnabas and Saul preachers. They were already doing that work (v1) and had been for some time (chapter 9,11). This was simply a call to make a particular preaching trip. And the wording of the instruction implies that they had already earlier been called to do this work, but the Holy Spirit here simply said the time had come. Further, this call was revealed to prophets by the Holy Spirit. This cannot happen today because the gift of prophecy has ceased (see above).

Saul and Barnabas made apostles here?

Mormons, and perhaps some others, claim that it was on this occasion that Saul was ordained as an apostle, and Barnabas was ordained an apostle at the same time. They claim Saul was taking the place of James who had been killed in 12:2. So they claim the church in every age has the authority to name successors to the apostles, as they are needed, so there will always be twelve. They claim the power to make apostles resides in the church (specifically in the other apostles). However:

(1) Where does the verse say Saul became an apostle at this time? The passage says only that they were called to make a preaching trip.

(2) Since Barnabas was also called, what apostle did he replace?

(3) Paul had been chosen an apostle from His mother's womb (Galatians 1:15), and called to that work by Jesus Himself on the Damascus

road (Acts 9:15; 22:14,15; 26:16). This had occurred long before these events in Acts 13.

(4) All other apostles were also called directly by the Lord Himself. As discussed regarding the selection of Matthias in Acts 1, neither the church nor the apostles had power to choose who would be apostles. Rather, each man had to be personally designated by Jesus Himself to be an apostle.

(5) To be an apostle, Paul had to be an eyewitness of Christ, just like other apostles (1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8; Acts 22:14,15; 26:16; compare 1:22). There is no evidence that Barnabas met that requirement. If he did, why was he not among those nominated for the job in Acts 1? No man today meets that requirement, so no one can be appointed an apostle. Those churches that claim to have apostles do not appoint men who meet the Scriptural requirement. Note 1 Corinthians 15:8.

(6) Paul was directly guided by the Holy Spirit before this time (see Galatians 1:11ff).

(7) As an apostle, He would have long proved that He had the power of an apostle by doing the signs of an apostle (2 Corinthians 12:11,12). What men today do the same kind of miracles done by the apostles in the book of Acts? Surely, Mormon apostles do not do so. They cannot be true apostles for the simple reason that they do not do the signs of an apostle.

(8) The sending out of Paul and Barnabas was done by the local church in Antioch, just like Barnabas had earlier been sent out by the church in Jerusalem (11:22). There was no involvement of any central church organization. Is that how churches today ordain “apostles”? Does each local church have the right to make men apostles?

(9) In truth, it follows from all the above that there are no apostles living on earth today, no successors to the apostles, and no one to appoint men to be apostles.

There is no evidence that Saul became an apostle at this name, and no evidence Barnabas was ever an apostle in the sense the twelve and Paul were. The laying on of hands here was not done for the purpose of imparting of spiritual gifts, since both men apparently already had spiritual gifts. Rather, this example shows that the expression can be used for a customary way of setting men apart to a work and showing support for them.

It is appropriate, but not necessarily required, that the appointing of men to such important work be accompanied by prayer and fasting.

13:4-12 - The Conversion of Sergius Paulus

13:4,5 – The traveling preachers went first to Cyprus and preached in Salamis.

Having left Antioch by the instruction of the Holy Spirit, they traveled to Seleucia (see *map*). Seleucia was a city on the sea at the mouth

of the Orontes River near Antioch. They sailed from there to Cyprus, an island off the coast (see *map*). Barnabas was originally from Cyprus (4:36), and the gospel had already been preached there (11:19).

They arrived in Salamis, on the eastern end of Cyprus (see *map*), and preached in the Jewish synagogues. This pattern would continue throughout Paul's work in preaching. When he went to a city, he would first go to the synagogues to find any Jews who would be open to the gospel (compare 13:15ff; 9:20; etc.). This had nothing to do with keeping the Jewish Sabbath, as some claim. It was simply the best opportunity to find people who would listen to the gospel.

We are told that John Mark was with them on this trip (compare 12:25; 13:13).

13:6-8 – Elymas opposed the effort to teach Sergius Paulus.

From Salamis they crossed the island to Paphos on the western end of the island (see *map*). There they found a Jew named Bar-Jesus who was a sorcerer and a false teacher. The case here is similar to that of Philip in Samaria confronting Simon the sorcerer (8:5-13). Note that, according to both the New Testament and the Old Testament, sorcerers are false teachers, so Bar-Jesus was in violation even of his Jewish religion (compare Deuteronomy 18:9-14; Leviticus 19:31; 20:6,27; Exodus 7:11,22; 8:7,18,19; Isaiah 8:19,20; Daniel 1:20; 2:1-13,27f; Galatians 5:19-21; Revelation 21:8; 22:15; Acts 8:9-13; 19:18-20; 13:4-12).

The proconsul in this city was named Sergius Paulus, and he had in some way apparently been associated with Bar-Jesus. Political leaders in those days often consulted sorcerers and magicians (compare Pharaoh in Moses' day and Babylonian rulers in Daniel's day). Yet, he was a man of understanding and wanted to hear what Paul and Barnabas had to say. A proconsul was an official in the Roman government who had legal and military authority in a region subject to Rome.

Bar-Jesus was also called Elymas by interpretation. He was determined that Sergius Paulus not accept the gospel, so he withstood the teaching (how he did so is not specified).

False teachers have always tried to hinder people from accepting the truth. Perhaps they do not wish to lose followers and financial support. Or in some cases, they may sincerely think the gospel is false (as Paul had been before his conversion). In other cases, if their followers were converted, they would be reminded that they themselves are in error and need to change. This makes them feel guilty, but they may be too proud to admit their error. To feel justified in having taught their views to so many people, they defend their views.

Regardless of the motive, false teachers have always opposed faithful teachers. We may as well expect it. Do not conclude that we are wrong or should compromise or keep quiet because we meet opposition. Nor should we become discouraged and quit. There has always been opposition, and always will be so.

Stringer points out that, if Sergius Paulus was a proconsul, that meant Cyprus was a Senatorial province (whose official would be appointed by the Roman Senate), as distinguished from an Imperial province (whose leader would be appointed by the Emperor). For many years critics claimed Luke was wrong here: that Cyprus was an Imperial province, so could not be ruled by a proconsul. However, in 22 AD Cyprus became a Senatorial province ruled by a proconsul. Coins have been found identifying rulers of Cyprus as proconsuls, including even a coin referring to a proconsul named Paulus!

Inscriptions referring to Sergius Paulus have also been found by archaeologists. His name is clearly found inscribed on a large stone in Cyprus (Holden and Geisler, pages 351-353). An article in *Bible and Spade* (fall, 2016) also cites evidence of inscriptions referring to his son and his daughter. An inscription found in Rome describes Sergius Paulus as later being responsible to care for the Tiber river in Rome.

The author of the article also discusses the possibility that Sergius Paulus may have adopted Paul, which was a common practice among the Roman nobility. This would have provided Paul with legal advantages and might also explain why he would have adopted the name of Paul. This name change occurs in this present story. (Some claim that Paul is simply the Greek form of the Hebrew name Saul.)

13:9-12 – Paul firmly rebuked Elymas and struck him blind.

For the first time Paul seemed to take the leadership. Previously Barnabas had been named first and seemed to lead. He still remained the chief speaker on some subsequent occasions.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul rebuked Elymas. Administering rebuke is never pleasant, but it is commanded (Revelation 3:19; Galatians 6:1,2; James 5:19,20; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Ephesians 5:11; 2 Timothy 4:2-4). This example shows that the Holy Spirit approves of it, when needed, for He led Paul to do it.

Many people today say such rebukes should not be given. “Don’t criticize other religions.” “Judge not,” etc. If these views are valid, why did Paul give such an overwhelming rebuke as in this example? And why did Jesus and His apostles and other faithful preachers do it repeatedly in Scripture? And why are we commanded to do it in the Scriptures just listed?

Note the terms Paul used:

“full of all deceit” (NKVJ, NASB, NIV) or “guile” (ASV), “subtily” (KJV), “underhandedness” (Goodspeed), “utter imposter” (NEB).

“and all fraud” (NKJV, NASB), “villany” (ASV), “trickery” (NIV), “mischief” (KJV), “charlatan” (NEB).

These terms rebuke Elymas for the deceit and trickery in his trade as a sorcerer and as a whole in his hypocritical opposition to the gospel.

“son of the devil” – Elymas was a son of the devil in that he imitated the character of the devil in his lies and deceit (compare John 8:38-47; Matthew 13:38).

“enemy of all righteousness” – By opposing the gospel and keeping people from accepting it, Elymas made himself an enemy of what was right.

“perverting the straight ways of the Lord” – To pervert is to twist, distort, pollute, or turn aside. This is what Elymas wanted to do to the proconsul (v8). We are not told exactly how. In any case, he tried to make the right ways of the Lord appear to be false, and to make what was false appear to be true. Such is perversion.

Paul then pronounced a punishment on Elymas.

The false teacher would be blind for a season. Immediately a mist and darkness fell on him and he went about seeking someone to lead him by the hand. The effect of this was that the proconsul believed, being astonished at the Lord’s teaching.

Here, as in Samaria (8:5-13), was a “showdown” between those who had true miraculous powers and a fraud who falsely claimed supernatural powers. The issue was who was a true teacher from God: Paul or Elymas? The answer was demonstrated by who had true power from God. If sorcery was the superior power, that would demonstrate it should be followed. But if sorcerers cannot resist or duplicate the power that is demonstrated by inspired men who spoke the gospel, then the gospel would stand confirmed as being from God. (Compare 1 Kings 18; Exodus 5; etc.)

The same contrast can be made between Bible miracles, such as this one, and the works of those who claim to do miracles from God today. If men today have true miraculous power of God, they can do works like Paul did here, or Moses in Egypt, or Philip in Samaria, or Elijah on Mt. Carmel. And they can do it even in the presence of false teachers, as these men did on these occasions. If they cannot do similar works, then their claims to have miraculous power are invalid and they are frauds like Elymas and Simon.

We challenge people, who claim to possess power to do miracles today, to do as Paul did here. Can they strike their opponents blind (just for a season)? If we are perverting the truth, as they claim, then they can do this to us. They cannot refuse on the grounds that we are false teachers and lack faith, for that was also the case with Elymas. In fact, that was the very reason why Paul did it to Elymas. And note that the effect was immediate. It did not have to wait a few days or weeks.

Further note that, contrary to the teaching of some, compassion on physically needy people (such as sickness, lameness, blindness, etc.) was not the primary motivating reason why miracles were done. If so, what physically needy person was helped by this miracle? Instead of healing the man, Paul caused a severe ailment the man had not previously had.

Instead, the purpose of miracles was to confirm the truth, and that purpose was accomplished in this case as Sergius Paulus was amazed at the miracle Paul did.

Note also that the characteristics of miracles are yet clearly present in this case. The inspired man first predicted the event that would happen, then it happened so completely that it was obvious to everyone. Furthermore, it happened immediately. It was therefore impossible by natural law and served the proper purpose of miracles.

13:13-52 - Teaching in Antioch of Pisidia

13:13 – At Perga Mark left the group and returned home.

From Paphos, Paul and his party sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, on the coast of Asia Minor (modern Turkey – see *map*). Note that the group was here called Paul and his party, not Barnabas and his party.

From here John Mark left the company and returned to Jerusalem (verse 15). We are not told why; however, he apparently did not have good reason. This event later became a source of strife between Barnabas and Paul so that they parted company on the next trip (chapter 15). Later, however, Mark was again in Paul's favor (2 Timothy 4:11), and eventually wrote the gospel of Mark. This shows that Christians may often make mistakes in life, perhaps especially in younger years, but can still become useful to the Lord if they make the proper corrections.

13:14 – In Antioch of Pisidia they sought opportunity to teach in the synagogue.

From there they went to Antioch of Pisidia (see *map*). This trip is believed to have been through a mountainous area infested by robbers. This may help explain Paul's comments that he had been in perils of robbers (2 Corinthians 11:26).

Again they entered the synagogue and sat down. This occurred on the Sabbath day, so some argue this proves Christians today should keep the Sabbath. But was this a gathering of Christians keeping the Sabbath? Surely not. No one in this area had yet been converted to the gospel. The synagogue was a place of Jewish worship (see verse 16), not Christian worship. Paul went there to find an opportunity to teach, as he had before and would in the future (compare verse 5).

Every case in which Paul taught in the synagogues on the Sabbath is similar. Each case was an assembly of Jews, not Christians (verses 16,43). Paul was there to teach, not to keep the Sabbath. No passage ever says Paul "kept" the Sabbath after his conversion. The Sabbath law, along with all the Law of Moses, was given to the nation of Israel – a national law – not a universal law meant for all people of all time (Deuteronomy 4:1,7-13,44,45; 5:1,6,15; Exodus 34:27,28; 31:13,16,17; 1 Kings 8:9,21). The Sabbath was removed with the Old Testament law when Jesus died (Hebrews 10:1-10; 7:11-14; 8:6-13; 9:1-4; 2 Corinthians 3:6-11;

Galatians 3:24,25; 5:1-6; Romans 7:1-7; Ephesians 2:11-16; Colossians 2:13-17).

For further discussion of the old law and the Sabbath for today, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

This example does show, however, that it is proper for Christians to enter the assemblies of people we believe to be in error, provided we have reason to believe we can teach the people the truth and we go there for that purpose. Some today object to such teaching methods, but Paul did it repeatedly (compare 9:20; 13:5; etc.).

13:15,16 – Given the opportunity, Paul addressed the assembled Jews.

In the synagogue, the Law and the Prophets were read (compare verse 27; Acts 15:21; Luke 4:16-20). Afterward, the rulers of the synagogue offered Paul and Barnabas an opportunity to address the people. This was evidently a customary act of hospitality or friendliness to strangers, perhaps especially because Paul had been trained as a Jewish teacher.

Paul took the opportunity and stood to teach. This shows why they went to the synagogues on the Sabbath. Jews would be gathered and they could take the opportunity to teach them. Note that the passage here plainly says the people addressed were “Men of Israel” or Jews. It is likely that men “who fear God” refers to Gentiles who had come to believe in the God worshiped by the Jews and wanted to learn more, but had not yet become Jewish proselytes (compare verse 26). This was the kind of man Cornelius was before his conversion (10:2,22).

Paul began by motioning with his hand, showing that then, as now, speakers used gestures when they spoke.

13:17 – Paul began with Israel’s release from Egypt.

Paul’s sermon was in many ways similar to that of Peter on Pentecost (Acts 2) and that of Stephen (Acts 7). He reviewed Jewish history and used it to give evidence that Jesus was the Messiah who fulfilled their prophecies.

God chose the fathers (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and his twelve sons). When the people were in Egypt in slavery, God led them out with great and powerful miracles.

By beginning with Jewish history, Paul stated facts the people knew, believed, and considered greatly important. He also showed his respect for the truth of the Old Testament and Jewish history. His teaching would not contradict what they had already learned but would harmonize with it and then show how it was fulfilled in Christ. He began with common ground and common interest. Then he reasoned to new truths they did not realize. Had he jumped right into the gospel they might have

viewed him as one who rebelled or disbelieved the teaching of the Old Testament regarding God and his dealing with Israel.

13:18-20 – God brought Israel through the wilderness, then gave them Canaan where judges led them.

Paul briefly described Jewish history after God led the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage. God put up with their conduct for about forty years in the wilderness. The ASV adds “as a nursing father” – i.e., like a father having to put up with the childish ways of a baby. This refers to Israel’s murmuring, complaining, and disobedience (see 1 Corinthians 10:1-12; Acts 7:39ff).

Finally, God led them into the land of Canaan, destroying seven nations in order to give Israel the land (compare Deuteronomy 7:1). The land was then distributed to the tribes. All this is recorded in the book of Joshua.

Judges ruled the people for about 450 years till the time of Samuel (Judges 2:19). This is recorded in the book of Judges. (There is some discussion of exactly what part of history is included in the 450 years. See Stringer for a discussion.)

13:21,22 – Israel was then ruled by kings: first Saul, then David, whom God called a man after His own heart.

Though God had given Israel judges, the people wanted a king (1 Samuel 8). God said that, in doing this, they had rejected Him from being their king. However, He tolerated their request and appointed a king for them: Saul the son of Kish of the tribe of Benjamin. He reigned as king for forty years (an interesting fact not mentioned in the Old Testament). He was a good and humble king at first, but in later years he sinned and turned from God because he became concerned about his own glory instead of being concerned for God’s will (see 1 Samuel 15 and following chapters).

God therefore replaced Saul with another king, David son of Jesse. God said David was “a man after My own heart,” who would do all God’s will. This does not mean David never sinned (consider his adultery and murder in the case of Bathsheeba). But David always repented and returned to God with true sorrow for his sins, in contrast to Saul who rebelled and never really returned.

13:23-25 – Jesus was a descendant of David as God had promised. His ministry was introduced by John.

Paul had traced this history quickly to the point of David. At this point he revealed his purpose. God had promised that He would raise up a Savior from the seed of David. Many passages refer to this promised seed of David (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 89:3ff; 132:11; Isaiah 9:6ff; 11:1; Luke 1:32,69; Matthew 1:1; John 7:42; Romans 1:3; Revelation 22:16).

Paul had now introduced the main point of his sermon. The history of Israel had pointed to the coming of the Christ. So here Paul proceeded

to state his proposition: Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ promised to come to Israel. Then he proceeded to provide arguments proving that Jesus is the Christ.

He first called John the Baptist as a witness for Jesus. The Jews accepted John as a prophet (Matthew 21:26). He preached the baptism of repentance, but plainly stated that he was not the promised savior. Instead, he said he came before to prepare the way for the Savior. He was not even worthy to unloose His shoe (Matthew chapter 3). (As stated by Paul, John's testimony merely showed that the Messiah was coming soon. As recorded by the apostle John in John 1, the full testimony was even more direct than that.) John not only preached, but also baptized people with a baptism of repentance.

13:26-28 – Jesus was killed in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, though there was no cause of death in Him.

Paul continued addressing these descendants of Abraham and God-fearers (see on verse 16) by affirming that the message of this prophesied Christ, who would bring salvation, had been sent to the very people whom he was addressing. They were descendants of Abraham, of the very nation that Christ had been promised to come from, in fulfillment of promises made even to Abraham. The implication is that these people knew these prophecies and now the blessing promised had been made available to them.

The Jews in Jerusalem and their rulers fulfilled the prophecies of the Christ by killing Him. They knew the Scriptures in that they read them every Sabbath in the synagogues (as had just been done in this synagogue – verse 15). Yet they did not understand them and did not recognize Christ, so they killed Him. There was no excuse for such ignorance, but it explained how such a great tragedy could occur among those who ought to have known better. But the end result was that, in their ignorance, they actually fulfilled Old Testament Scripture and thereby helped prove that Jesus was the very One whom they denied Him to be!

Here Paul gave another proof of Jesus' claims: fulfilled prophecy. And note again that the prophecies included the fact Christ must die. This was contrary to the Jews' expectations, just as it is contrary to many modern premillennial theories, but it was not contrary to God's plan and predictions.

The Roman governor Pilate did the actual killing of Jesus, but it was at the wish of the Jews. No real fault was found in Jesus. The people claimed fault in Him, but could produce no proof of any. Pilate said repeatedly that he found no fault in Jesus (Matthew 27:18,23; etc.). Yet, he committed the cowardly act of crucifying a man he knew to be innocent because the people wanted him to do so.

13:29-31 – The apostles were witnesses that God had raised Jesus from the dead.

When all the prophecies about Jesus death had been fulfilled, His body was taken down from the cross and buried in a tomb. But God raised Him from the dead. Here is the third proof of Jesus' claims: the resurrection. Note how calmly and plainly Paul stated such an amazing fact.

That people might be sure He had been raised, Jesus openly appeared to many people from Galilee to Jerusalem. This continued over a period of "many days." The people who saw him were witnesses who could testify that He was alive again (see 1 Corinthians 15:1-8). The evidence is exactly the same as presented by Peter on Pentecost, and by Stephen and others. It is the same proof we should present to all who have doubts about Jesus' claims.

13:32,33 – This fulfilled the promise made to the fathers.

Paul then declared the good news (gospel) that the promise that had been made to the fathers was fulfilled in Jesus, especially in His resurrection. God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that all nations would be blessed through their seed. He had also promised to David that his descendant would sit on his throne. Paul proceeded, not just to claim that this was fulfilled in Jesus, but to quote specific prophecies Jesus fulfilled.

The first was from Psalm 2:7: "You are my son. Today I have begotten you." Paul said this referred to Jesus' resurrection, not to His physical birth. Jesus was in a sense, born or begotten from the dead, not by birth from his mother's womb but by re-birth from the grave (compare Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5; 1 Corinthians 15:20,23). Other passages that quote this verse or concept and apply it to Jesus are Hebrews 5:5; 1:5; 2:9 (see McGarvey).

Jesus had, of course, referred to God as His Father and Himself as the Son of God numerous times before His resurrection. He and His Father had the close, loving, united relationship of a father and son long before He died and arose. But the resurrection was the unique proof that He was God's Son (Romans 1:4). And in the resurrection God accomplished what can figuratively be called a begetting or birth.

13:34,35 – Paul then quoted other passages Jesus fulfilled.

Isaiah 55:3 and Psalm 16:10 also predicted that the Christ would be given the sure mercies of David, and that God would not allow His Holy One to see corruption.

Paul had introduced the concept that Jesus was the promised descendant of David (see verses 22,23). So upon the Jews came the sure mercies that had been promised to David. This does not, of itself, appear to predict a resurrection except as it connects to the next prophecy and other points Paul had made.

Even before Isaiah 55, Isaiah had predicted the Messiah's death (Isaiah 53), and Paul had already stated that Jesus did die (verses 28,29). How then could the blessings promised to David come true unless Jesus was raised from the dead? If he died and that was the end, then the promises to David did not come true. But by being raised from the dead and then sitting on David's throne never to die again, Jesus fulfilled the promise of the sure mercies of David.

The second prophecy Paul quoted here must refer to a resurrection since that is the only way one can escape corruption after he dies. The prophecy had been quoted and its application to Jesus had been explained by Peter in Acts 2:29ff. Paul proceeded to give further explanation here in the subsequent verses.

13:36,37 – The promise of one who saw no corruption was fulfilled in Jesus.

By necessary inference, Paul argued that this passage cannot apply to David himself, since he died after serving the people of Israel in his generation according to the will of God. Then he was buried and saw corruption. Since the prophecy did not apply to himself personally, it must be a prediction regarding his descendant the Messiah (like many other of David's statements).

It was therefore the Messiah who, though he would die, would not see corruption because he would be raised from the dead. This truly is what happened to Jesus in fulfillment of this passage. Here is a plain prediction that Jesus would die and would be raised from the dead (see other notes on Acts 3).

13:38,39 – Jesus brought to all men justification from sin, which they could not have received under the law.

Paul brought his lesson to a conclusion by restating his proposition (as in verse 23) and making application. He repeated that Jesus is the one who can give forgiveness of sins, and that people who believe in Him can be justified from that which the law could not give them justification. If Jesus indeed is the Christ, then He is the Savior promised in such passages as Isaiah 53. If people want salvation that He offers, they must believe in Him. In this way they could be justified or counted right before God despite their sins. This was something the Law of Moses could never do for them.

Note that Jesus would not force the Jews to accept Him. They must choose to believe in Him if they want the salvation He offers. Belief was the one condition that Jews, like Paul himself before his conversion, found so hard to accept. Paul's intent was not to belittle or deny the need for obedience. The point was that these Jews needed to take the first step, the first major hurdle. They needed to believe in Jesus. Till they did, they would see no reason for obedience; and even if anyone made outward pretensions at obedience, it would do no good without faith.

In this statement Paul also urged these Jews to see that they needed Jesus because the Old Testament could not do for them what Jesus can do. It could not justify them from their sins. Giving up the law would be very difficult for Jews to do. They clung to it as a proof of the greatness and importance of their nation before God. But when they realized it could not save them from sin, they should have seen their need to give it up.

Why could it not justify? Because it had only animal sacrifices that could not permanently remove guilt (Hebrews 10:3,4). With Jesus' sacrifice we have complete forgiveness so sins are remembered no more (Hebrews 10:9-18). This is why all men, Jew and Gentile, must accept Him as Savior and Lord.

Paul here stopped short of saying the law had been completely removed. He elsewhere plainly makes this point, but here he simply showed that it could not meet their need for salvation. Nevertheless, the statement as he made it would likely be offensive to the Jews, so he immediately warned them of the consequences of rejecting the teaching.

13:40,41 – Paul's final statement was a warning of the danger of refusing to believe what he had taught.

He knew by experience that Jews often refused to believe, so he anticipated their response. He did so by again appealing to their own Scriptures. Habakkuk 1:5 predicted that God would work a wonder so great that many people would not believe it, even when it was explained. Those who did not believe would perish.

Here Paul was plain and pointed. He had won their interest by citing their own history and Scriptures. Then he used those Scriptures to show that they needed to believe in Jesus. Finally, he used the Scriptures to show the danger of refusing to accept the truths he taught them. The consequence of unbelief was to perish.

13:42,43 – The messengers urged the people to continue trusting God's grace.

Paul and Barnabas left the synagogue with the other Jews. After the meeting had disbanded, some people begged to have these words preached to them the next Sabbath. The ASV does not identify who these people were, but the KJV says it was Gentiles. We are not told how or why Gentiles even heard about it. Perhaps some (such as the devout God-fearers mentioned earlier) had attended the meeting and told others. Perhaps any new thing in town was spread. There were many proselytes, so the Gentiles had already received some strong influence to know and accept what was taught among the Jews.

In addition, many Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, so they spoke further to the people exhorting them to continue in God's grace. Proselytes were people who were not Jewish in race or nationality, but which had been converted to accept the Jewish religion.

“Grace” is unmerited favor. God’s grace is the favor He has shown whereby He sent Jesus to be the sacrifice to die for our sins though we do not deserve it. The gospel is a message of good news because it tells us our sins can be forgiven by God’s power despite our unworthiness.

In what sense could these people continue in the grace of God? Perhaps the implication is that some of them were persuaded to the point of being baptized. However, another meaning may have been intended. Just the opportunity to hear the gospel and learn about it was an act of God’s grace. Jews also had, under the law, received many blessings and privileges by God’s grace that they had not deserved. Now they had not only received these blessings in the past, but Paul was urging them to see the need to accept the further undeserved blessings that God was encouraging them to receive in the gospel.

13:44,45 – When nearly the whole city came to hear the message the next week, the Jews began to contradict it.

Paul’s sermon stirred up such great interest that the next week nearly the whole city came together to hear God’s word. What a great blessing that, in just one week’s time, they had an opportunity to teach nearly everyone in the city!

Note that this was a meeting of Jews and Gentiles as well. The fact it occurred on the Sabbath does not prove Paul kept the Sabbath any more than it proved the Gentiles kept it. The first preaching in this city had occurred in a Jewish synagogue on the Sabbath, and it apparently was a convenient time to meet on the next Sabbath. Nothing here or elsewhere says Paul observed the Sabbath as a matter of religious requirement before God.

But the Jews were upset when they observed the large crowds and the success of these prophets in getting a following. They were envious, just like the Jewish rulers had envied Jesus’ success (Matthew 27:18). They determined to hinder the message by contradicting and opposing what Paul was saying. And as it was with Jesus, the contradiction was soon followed by open persecution.

It is shameful but true that throughout history many zealous religious people have opposed the truth of God’s word. These were not motivated by a sincere love for truth, as you would expect of religious leaders. They were instead concerned mainly for a following for themselves or their pet doctrines. They could not bring themselves to admit what was taught was true because they might lose popularity. They would rather people did not know the truth at all. So in their zeal for a following, they led themselves and many others to fail to follow God! Still other such teachers are motivated by love of money or other ulterior motives.

13:46 – The preachers rebuked the Jews for rejecting the message and said they would turn to the Gentiles.

The opposition must have been quite severe. After just two meetings with these Jews, Paul and Barnabas determined they would not bother teaching them further. They said it was necessary for them to teach the word of God to the Jews first (since this evidently was God's plan). However, since the Jews rejected the message, they determined they would in the future teach Gentiles.

They said that, when one rejects the gospel, he judges himself unworthy of eternal life. Likewise, when we boldly tell people what God's word says and they oppose it, we are not "judging" them in any improper way. Rather, by their own conduct, they are judging themselves to be unworthy of eternal life.

Some folks to try use verse 48 to prove unconditional election. If so, then its counterpart must be unconditional rejection. But this verse shows it is not true. God does not unconditionally save or reject anyone. He offers salvation to all. Those who are lost like these Jews, "judge **them**" worthy to be lost. They make up their own mind and in doing so determine their own destiny. The same is true of those who obey. Remember that, even before verse 48, Paul has already shown that it is the choice made by people themselves that determine their destiny.

13:47 – Paul quoted Old Testament Scripture that the message of the gospel would go to the Gentiles.

Isaiah 49:6 said that the light (the truth of the gospel message about Jesus) that brings salvation would go to the Gentiles, to the end of the earth. Paul and Barnabas had worked among Gentiles in Antioch soon after the revelation to Peter that the gospel should go to Gentiles. Jesus had expressly told Paul, when He called him, that he would carry the message to Gentiles (22:21; 9:15). Now Paul offered further evidence, even in Old Testament prophecy, that this had been God's intent all along. The Jews, however, were generally offended at such an idea, even when it was quoted from their own law.

13:48 – The Gentiles rejoiced in the opportunity to hear the gospel, and many believed.

The emphasis in the teaching would no longer be on the Jews. This alienated the Jews, but it caused joy to the Gentiles. They glorified God's word and many believed.

Some argue that the expression "appointed to eternal life" teaches Calvinistic predestination.

This is the idea that certain individuals were unconditionally chosen before the world began to be saved, regardless of their character, will, or conduct. They must respond to the gospel when they hear it because God has unalterably decreed that they must. On the other hand, other people He has unalterably decreed will not obey and must be lost. These cannot

obey the gospel when they hear it because God has decreed they will not and therefore cannot.

This of course makes God a respecter of persons since the choice of who is saved was determined entirely by God regardless of the character of the people (compare Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:6-11). It also denies that man is a free moral agent having the power to choose whether he will or will not serve God (as contradiction to Joshua 24:15; Mark 16:15,16; Matthew 11:28-30; Revelation 22:17; etc.). It even contradicts verse 46 where we saw that people are lost because of their own choice. (See notes on verse 46.)

In truth, God does not ordain men unconditionally to be saved or lost. He ordains men **conditionally** based on the kind of people they choose to become. Compare this to the concept that certain men are “ordained” to serve as elders or deacons, but only when they meet the qualifications that God set forth. In the same way, God has set forth the qualifications people must meet to be saved. So God ordained that, those who meet those qualifications, would receive eternal life.

Specifically, God has ordained that all people who are willing to humbly submit to the gospel, believing and obeying it, are “ordained to eternal life.” Those who will not, are not ordained to eternal life. He designed the gospel so as to appeal to the kind of person He had chosen to be saved, and the same gospel repels those who are not that kind of person. But what kind of person we are or become is our own choice. See also Romans 8 and 1 Peter 1. The present passage simply says that people, who chose to become the kind God ordained to be saved, were affected by the gospel in the manner He intended them to be. They believed and as a result received the hope of eternal life.

(McGarvey and Stringer offer another possibility. They point out that the word for “ordained” here is not the word for foreordained. Rather, it refers simply to a thing that is determined or set in order – see Romans 13:2; 1 Corinthians 16:15; Acts 15:2. But the verse does not tell **who** determined that the people would receive eternal life. Perhaps they were ordained by their own choice, just as the sinners in verse 46 judged themselves unworthy of eternal life. The conclusion is the same from either viewpoint: it was the choice of the people that ultimately determined what destiny they received.)

For further discussion of election and predestination, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

13:49,50 – The Jews caused such persecution that the preachers had to leave.

Despite the opposition of the Jews, the gospel effectively spread throughout the region. This infuriated the Jews so that they moved beyond speaking against the gospel. They actively pursued physical violence.

They stirred up devout and prominent women and they got certain important men in the city on their side. With the help of these people, they brought persecution against Paul and Barnabas to the point they were expelled from the region.

Note that prominent and wealthy people often oppose the gospel. It has often been so. It is also true that “devout” or religious people often oppose the gospel because it does not teach *their* brand of devotion. The gospel has always opposed false religion of all kinds. The fact one is religious is no guarantee he is religiously right! It is therefore foolish for people today to tell us we should not speak against other religious beliefs. The gospel has always conflicted with other religious beliefs, and the only way to avoid that result is to preach a different gospel (Galatians 1:8,9).

It is also interesting that women were here influential in opposition to the gospel. In many places women are among the staunchest supporters of truth. But women as well as men can be in error and work against truth.

Paul later recalled this persecution in 2 Timothy 3:11. Though they continued to preach the word, these men still had feelings, and such mistreatment remained in their memories for many years.

13:51,52 – The preachers went on to Iconium, but the disciples were filled with joy.

Paul and Barnabas did not give up their preaching work because of this experience. Paul had already left Damascus and Jerusalem because of persecution (Acts 9). This was the first city in this journey they had to leave because of persecution, but it was far from the last. It happened to Paul again and again, just as Jesus had predicted it would (9:16).

They shook off the dust of their feet against them and went to the next city. Shaking off the dust of the feet was a symbolic act Christ had given to the apostles to show that the people had rejected God’s word. Therefore, His messengers expressed this as though they did not even want the dust of the city clinging to them. The result served as a testimony against those who caused the persecution (compare Matthew 10:14 and parallel accounts; Acts 18:6).

The next city was Iconium (see *map*). The account of the work there is continued in the next chapter.

One might have expected the new converts in Antioch to be deeply grieved and sorrowing over the persecution and the departure of the prophets. Instead, they were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. The great blessings in Christ and the knowledge of truth and the hope of eternal life encouraged them despite the persecution.

Acts 14

14:1-6 - Preaching in Iconium

14:1,2 – Jews in Iconium again opposed the gospel and caused persecution.

From Antioch Paul and Barnabas went to Iconium (see *map*). There they went into the synagogue of the Jews. Note again that, as in Antioch, this was not an assembly of Christians who were observing the Sabbath. This was an assembly of unbelieving Jews, and Paul's purpose was to teach them so they would believe. (See notes on 13:14.)

The result of the teaching was that a great multitude did believe. Note the connection between speaking the word and belief (compare Romans 10:13-17; 1:16). The gospel message is the power that produces faith. Faith was not produced by some direct action of the Holy Spirit apart from the word. Nor did the apostles use gimmicks that appealed to the carnal, physical interests of the people, such as entertainment, games, or sports, to attract the people. They simply taught the truth. That is the approach we too must diligently use.

Apparently, there were also Greeks present who believed (the word designates Greek-speaking Gentiles, not necessarily Greek-speaking Jews). As in Antioch, however, there were some disobedient Jews who did not believe the truth but opposed it. They stirred up the Gentiles and embittered them against the preachers. The opposition against truth and Paul's work continued. We will see it nearly everywhere he went.

14:3 – Despite the opposition, Paul and Barnabas stayed in Iconium a long time boldly speaking the word of the Lord

How long they stayed is not specified. The hatred against them apparently continued a long time before it led to a forcible effort to expel them as had happened in Antioch.

Note that they spoke boldly. It would take boldness to continue to speak the truth in the face of such opposition. We need such boldness today. The apostles often demonstrated it and prayed for it (compare 4:29-31; Ephesians 6:18-20; etc.).

The Lord empowered the prophets to perform signs and wonders to confirm the message.

The purpose of miracles is stated here as clearly as anywhere in the Scriptures. They were done to bear witness to the word. They constituted

evidence that the inspired men through whom they were done were really speaking truth from God. Because there are false teachers and those who falsely claim the power of God, people need some way to distinguish true teachers from false. Miracles are one such proof. See Mark 16:20; John 5:36; 20:30,31; Acts 2:22; 2 Corinthians 12:11,12; Hebrews 2:3,4; 1 Kings 18:36-39; Exodus 4:1-9; 7:3-5; 14:30,31

The message preached was the “word of His grace.”

The grace of God is extended through the **word** of God. There is no other way to learn of His grace or to learn how to receive the benefit of that grace (compare Romans 1:16; Acts 11:14; John 6:44,45; Romans 10:13-17).

The grace of God is not extended by some “still small voice” inside us, nor by an overwhelming experience, a miraculous vision, or a direct operation of the Holy Spirit. Grace is abundant to cover all sin, but men can receive it only in harmony with the will of God.

The only way to know whether God’s grace will or will not forgive a person is by the **word** of God. Many people speculate that God’s grace will cover certain sins (especially the ones they or their loved ones are determined to continue to commit). They say, “God is a loving God, and His grace will surely cover...” Yet they have no passage to prove God’s grace will cover what they say it will.

No man has the right to teach that God’s grace will forgive a man unless the word of God says so. God operates in accordance with His will, and His will regarding His grace is revealed in the word. If a man is living outside the revealed limits of God’s will, then there is no hope and no promise that the grace of God will save that man. To promise the grace of God will cover such a man anyway is to teach error and do great disservice to the hearers. The right and Scriptural thing to do is to warn people of their error so they can repent and truly receive God’s grace.

14:4 – The result of the preaching of the word was division.

Some people agreed with Paul and Barnabas, but others agreed with the Jews who were disobedient. Division will always occur (as it often did in Acts and in Jesus’ lifetime) when some people accept the truth and some don’t.

Some people think that **unity** must result whenever the gospel is preached. If division results, they argue as though the gospel was not properly preached. The logical conclusion is that both sides in every division are always wrong. Some argue that preachers should even compromise the truth to produce unity.

But the miracles that occurred in this case prove that the preaching was of God (verse 3). Yet it resulted in division. So, here as in multitudes of other examples in the lives of Jesus and His apostles, division occurred because truth was taught. This will always happen whenever some people accept truth and others reject it. In such cases, it is still good

and right to teach truth, because this gives sinners the chance to be saved. If division results, it is the fault of those who refused to obey the truth.

Note that both Barnabas and Paul are here called apostles. Paul was an apostle in the sense that the twelve were, but Barnabas is never so described in Scripture. The twelve apostles and Paul were eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ, especially chosen by Jesus Himself to bear that testimony (see Acts 1:22).

However, the word “apostle” in general means one who is sent on a mission (see Philippians 2:25; 1 Thessalonians 2:6; Galatians 1:19). This kind of usage happens with many New Testament words. For example, the word “church” can be used for a riotous mob, and “baptism” can refer to washing pots and pans, and “elder” can refer to older men. But these words all have specific meanings in the gospel in most contexts. So the general sense of “apostle” must apply in this case, not the specific sense used for the twelve and Paul elsewhere. Paul and Barnabas were apostles of the church sent on a special mission by the church in Antioch.

14:5,6 – Because of an attempt to stone them, the preachers finally fled to Lystra and Derbe.

Though the preachers had been able to teach for some time in Iconium, the Jews and Gentiles were finally able, with the help of their rulers, to make a violent assault on Paul and Barnabas. The plan was to attack and stone them.

Paul and Barnabas, however, learned of the attempt and fled. Note that it is not Scriptural to use force and violence against those who attack and persecute us for our faith. However, it is legitimate to flee for safety.

Paul and Barnabas went to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia (see **map**). Interestingly, Luke’s language here implied that Lystra and Derbe were in Lycaonia, but Iconium was not. For many years, some scholars claimed Luke was wrong and Iconium was in the same region as Lystra and Derbe. In his attempts to disprove Luke’s accuracy, the skeptic Sir William Ramsay found an inscription that confirmed Luke’s statement. This became a major turning point that led Ramsay to believe in the accuracy of Scripture.

14:7-20 - Preaching in Lystra: A Lamé Man Healed, Paul Worshipped and Stoned

14:7 – In the region of Lystra and Derbe, Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel.

What a simple yet vital thought. These men were accompanied by continual danger. They had just been forced to flee two cities in a row to preserve their lives. Did they cease preaching, become despondent, or try to compromise to avoid division and achieve peace? No, they preached the gospel. They repeated the very activity that led to their expulsion from the last two cities. It is easy for us to read these accounts

without emotion, but imagine how we would feel had we been there! Do we have the boldness of Paul and Barnabas?

Further, they continued to use the same humble but powerful means they had been using all along to make disciples. They just taught the gospel of Jesus. There is no mention of the human promotional schemes and carnal attractions that so many tell us today should be used. Where was the bus ministry, the banquets, parties, carnivals, recreation, sports, and entertainment, the free gifts, the centralized organization to supervise their work?

The plain and simple method they used is the same we ought to use. They just preached the gospel (see Romans 1:16).

14:8-10 – Paul healed a lame man who had never walked.

A particularly noteworthy healing occurred at this time. This was doubtless one of the kinds of miracles God did through these men to confirm the word (verse 3). Just as in Acts 3, this involved the healing of a man who was lame or crippled and unable to walk since birth. The inspired apostle told him to stand up, and the man leaped and walked (see notes on Acts 3; compare Acts 9:32-35).

This again confirms the characteristics of true Bible miracles. What “faith healer” today will do such miracles on a man known in the community to have been lame since birth?

This cripple, however, was slightly different from the one in Acts 3. This man had listened to Paul’s preaching and had already developed faith to be healed, whereas the one in Acts 3 apparently was expecting no such thing. This proves that sometimes people had faith before being healed. Yet such is not always the case (compare John 11:38-44; Acts 3:1-10; 5:1-11; 13:4-12; etc.). The primary purpose of miracles (as per verse 3) was to give evidence on which the audience could base their faith and determine the preachers to be truly from God instead of frauds (compare Acts 8:5-12).

Sometimes modern “healers” attempt to heal someone and fail, so they claim the failure occurred because the person who sought the healing lacked faith. But where is the case where Paul or any apostle (after the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost) tried to heal someone and failed? They never did fail at all, let alone did they blame it on someone else’s lack of faith. Faith was not necessary, as already demonstrated. And when, as in this case, faith was an element in the decision to do the miracle, the man of God was able to determine that the person had faith before he attempted the miracle. He never attempted it, failed, and blamed it on the person’s lack of faith!

14:11-13 – The people attempted to make sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas as gods.

The miracle had the desired effect of causing the people to believe Paul and Barnabas were from God. But the heathen idol worshipers, in

their pagan ignorance, went too far and concluded Paul and Barnabas were themselves gods in the form of men! They even determined which gods they were! They said Barnabas was Jupiter (Greek Zeus, the chief of the gods), and Paul was Mercury (Greek Hermes, the chief messenger of the gods) because Paul was the one who did most speaking.

Believing these men to be gods, they prepared to offer sacrifice to them as they did to their gods in their idolatry. They had a temple of Zeus in their city, so the priest of Zeus brought animals to sacrifice to the men.

This conclusion was, of course, entirely unacceptable. First, the people were exalting human beings as if they were Deity. Two examples in Acts have already shown the error of this (10:25,26; 12:21ff). Only Jesus was God in the form of man. Second, the people were not honoring the true God, but viewed Paul and Barnabas as heathen deities. The whole activity was unacceptable because it did not bring the people out of their idolatry but simply became an excuse to continue it.

People today may not call preachers gods, but it is a common problem to fail to distinguish properly between the messenger of God and the God who sent the messenger. People who hear truth or see miracles in a man tend to exalt the man instead of God. See 1 Corinthians 1:10-13,18ff. It is the responsibility of a true man of God to put an end to such errors as Peter did in Acts 10:25,25. We will see how Paul and Barnabas dealt with it and thereby see how Herod should have dealt with it in Acts 12.

14:14,15 – Paul and Barnabas urged the people to turn from idols and worship the true God, not just men.

Some people, even today, enjoy the prestige and pride of being exalted to positions of Deity. But Paul and Barnabas knew such things were wrong, so they ran into the midst of the multitude having torn their clothes. Torn garments were a sign of anguish or sorrow. They were not pleased but sorrowed. We today should likewise be sorrowed when people give the honors of Deity to that which is not Deity.

Paul and Barnabas stated the basic issue involved. They were not gods but just men having the same nature and emotions as the people that were trying to worship them. They were not above other people as Deity. On the contrary, their whole purpose there was to get the people to stop their idolatrous exaltation of things that were not God and to start worshipping the one true and living God who made heaven, earth, sea, and all things in them.

This is the critical issue in the worship of the true God versus idolatry. Idolatry consists of worshiping things that are not truly God. God is God because He is the Creator of the whole universe and therefore the ruler of all. Idolatry consists of worshiping things that are part of the creation: people (religious teachers, kings, ancestors, saints), or heavenly bodies (sun, moon, stars), or other parts of nature (mountains, oceans, etc.). These things cannot be God because God made them. Only the ultimate Maker can be God.

Other forms of idolatry consist of worshiping imaginary beings that partake of the nature of superhuman, supernatural beings, but do not have the nature of God Himself. The Roman and Greek deities were basically imaginary super-humans. They were alleged to do things people could not do, yet they possessed many of the same characteristics of people but only in a more advanced way. They were wiser than men, but still could be fooled and make mistakes (not all-wise and all-knowing). They were stronger than men, but still limited in power (not all-powerful). In particular, none of them could rule the whole universe, but their power was limited by and shared with other deities in other places and positions. The God of the Bible is the Creator of all things in the universe and therefore the uncontested Ruler of all, without the limitations of humans.

Further, God created living things, so He Himself must be living (1 Thessalonians 1:9). Life and intelligence could not come from dead, lifeless matter. So, anything dead cannot be God, including the sun, moon, stars, oceans, etc. Also included are images carved of wood, stone, or precious metal. Study also Acts 17:22-31.

Note that Paul and Barnabas called such idols “useless” or “vain.” This is exactly correct, because false gods have no power at all. They cannot really bless or guide people in any way. They cannot give proper instruction how to live life, cannot provide what is needed either physically or spiritually, cannot answer prayer, and surely cannot forgive sins or provide eternal life. People worship and serve them thinking they can do any or all of these things, but it is all a waste because the idols are “useless.”

So only God deserves to be worshiped and honored as God. To honor the creation or any part of it or imaginary super-human beings is to fail to recognize the true degree of exaltation God deserves to have over His creation. Yet heathen idolatry regularly makes this error. And modern idolatry, which was adopted by “Christian” churches from heathenism, is no better. This includes bowing to priests and popes, praying to saints and Mary, kneeling before images and pictures, etc.

Paul and Barnabas are again here called “apostles.” See notes on verse 4.

14:16,17 – God gave evidence of His existence by His blessings of rain and fruitful seasons.

In previous years, God had allowed the Gentiles to walk in their own ways. He overlooked their ignorance (17:30) because He had given up on them (Romans chapter 1). This does not mean He accepted or approved of their conduct, nor even that He did not care one way or the other about it, let alone that they would be saved despite it. It simply means He made no special, worldwide efforts to reveal His laws to them or send prophets to them to appeal to them to repent and obey. However, now under the

gospel, He was making a worldwide effort to reveal Himself to all people and to call them all to repentance.

But though God had allowed the heathen to do as they pleased, yet He had continued to give witness or evidence of His existence. This evidence was found in the creation itself and the blessings people receive through the creation: rain, fruitful harvests, food, and gladness.

How are these things witnesses of God? They testify of His existence and power (Romans 1:20), because there is no other explanation for their existence other than that they were made by God. These events show evidence of intelligent design. They were obviously made to accomplish purposes, thereby demonstrating the existence of a Supreme Creative Living Intelligence – God. None of the heathen deities were adequate to create the universe or provide such blessings. So, the heathen were without excuse when they refused to search for and find the true God (see again Romans 1 and Acts 17).

These blessings also show the benevolent nature of God. He gave good gifts to the people. How could they explain the existence of good gifts unless there the Power in control of nature was a good God?

This evidence constitutes “witness” of God. God is a God who gives evidence of His existence. He does not expect men to accept such major truths on the basis of speculation or unproved opinion. He gives the evidence and expects us to reason to the proper conclusions. The same evidence exists today and ought to lead all men to the same conclusions today. This is why people who do not believe in God are without excuse.

14:18 – Even with such plain speech, Paul and Barnabas had difficulty keeping the people from sacrificing to them.

The people had said Paul and Barnabas were gods, but then did not want to listen to what the men said, even when they said they were not gods! People who get false ideas in their minds can be very difficult to convince to change.

Note the difference between the approach used in teaching heathen idol worshipers as compared to the approach used to teach Jews who believed in the true God. Paul and Barnabas would quote Old Testament prophecy to Jews who knew it and accepted it (Acts 13), but such would have little value with Gentiles. They could assume the Jews believed in the true God and could proceed to show why they should believe in Jesus. But these Gentiles did not even believe in the true God, so they had to begin by convincing them of the true God.

An important teaching principle is taught here: always begin by finding out where the students are and proceed from there to teach them the most basic things they need to know next.

Note also that this sermon shows us how to reason with people who do not know the true God to convince them to believe in Him. We begin

with nature and the evidence of creation that cannot be explained without God. From there we must proceed to convince them the gospel is a message from God, Jesus is the Son of God, etc.

14:19,20 – Paul was stoned and left for dead, but he arose and left for Derbe.

The inhabitants of Lystra powerfully demonstrate the incredible fickleness of people. When Paul and Barnabas did a great miracle, the people were convinced they were gods and sought to offer sacrifice to them. But when Paul and Barnabas denied being gods and taught the people they were wrong to worship idols, soon the people were convinced to try to kill them! Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, where Paul had been compelled to leave town because of persecution. They persuaded the people to stone Paul to death and dragged him out of the town thinking he was dead!

Many people are just this fickle today. They may quickly accept and honor someone who pleases them and says what they want to hear. But they can just as quickly turn against that very same person when he tells them what they don't want to hear. Watch for the man who is too easily persuaded to "accept" the truth. He may be just as easily persuaded to leave it! And if he does, he may very well turn against the very people he praised so highly just shortly before.

Fortunately, Paul was not dead. He got up and went back into the city. Then the next day he and Barnabas went to the city of Derbe (see **map**). It sounds as though Paul's recovery was a miracle, though we are not given enough detail to be certain. How could a man left for dead after being stoned get up and walk and even be able to travel the next day? Surely it would take time to recover even if he was not quite dead (though perhaps the brethren believed it was so dangerous for him to stay that they arranged for him to travel even though still suffering).

Note also the irony of the fact Jews followed Paul to persecute him. This is exactly what he had done before his conversion. As a Jew, he had followed Christians from town to town to persecute them. Now he was a Christian and Jews are doing the same thing to him!

14:21,22 – The preachers returned to strengthen the disciples to continue faithful through many tribulations.

Three cities in a row had now forced Paul to leave: Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. In Lystra he had even been left for dead! Did he quit preaching? No, he went to the next city of Derbe and preached there and converted many people. Then he returned to the very same cities he had been forced to leave and preached there again! Paul was surely a man of great courage and conviction. Perhaps the fact the people thought he was dead may have indirectly helped because they would have dismissed him as no longer a problem and would not have suspected him of continuing to teach.

Paul and Barnabas had made many disciples and established several churches on this preaching trip. In several cities (especially the ones named) they had no time, on their first visits, to strengthen and establish these Christians in their growth because they were compelled to leave town. Yet they knew these people needed further teaching to ground them in the faith. So they returned to these cities. This time their purpose was not so much to make new converts as to strengthen those who were already Christians.

They confirmed the disciples by strengthening them and establishing them and exhorting them to continue in the faith. The very fact people need such teaching shows that, contrary to what some believe, it is possible for a child of God to fall away from the faith and be lost. We today need to be sure that our new converts are strengthened and encouraged to remain faithful. It is not enough just to baptize converts. We must instruct and urge them to grow in God's service.

Specifically, people often fall away because of opposition and persecution. In particular, these people had seen the persecution experienced by the men who had converted them. Paul and Barnabas said we should expect opposition and be willing to suffer it to enter the eternal kingdom. Contrary to what some teach today, God has not promised Christians a life of ease, removing all our physical and material problems if we serve Him. On the contrary, He has promised problems in this life (Matthew 5:10-12; 2 Timothy 3:12). The reward comes after this life.

14:23 – They appointed elders in each of these churches.

As they visited these churches that had already been established, Paul and Barnabas made sure elders were appointed in every church. The only previous mention of elders was in 11:30 (see notes there). We will learn more about the work of these men later (see Acts 20). 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 show the kind of men that should be appointed to the position.

Little is said here about the work of qualifications of elders or even about how the men were chosen and appointed. Some might suppose that Paul and Barnabas on their own decided whom to appoint, but the passage does not say how the men were chosen. The fact that other passages give qualifications for elders would imply that the church should choose men who meet those qualifications (surely the apostles could not be present in every church to make such choices). The approach described in Acts 6 (though the men there were not chosen to be elders) would help us understand how the church should choose men when they are appointed to special works.

What the passage does teach is this: (1) It should be the goal of every local church to appoint its own elders, and (2) each local church should have a plurality of elders (no one man alone may oversee a local church). These concepts are confirmed by other passages. Since each church was to have its own elders, it follows that the work of elders is a local work or

responsibility. Their supervision applies only to the one local church where they were appointed (compare Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-3).

We can also learn that, although all local churches must seek to have elders, yet local churches can (and usually will) exist and function without elders at least for a time in their history. These churches had existed for some time without them, then the men were appointed when Paul and Barnabas returned.

This is natural because the qualifications are of such a nature as to require men to be Christians a while before they can be appointed. A new congregation is not likely to have a plurality of such men till it has existed awhile. So, contrary to the beliefs of some, local churches can exist and must function without elders until such time as a plurality of qualified men exist. It is not God's plan for churches simply to appoint the best men they have, even if they do not possess the qualities of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

Note also that Paul and Barnabas prayed and fasted with the church and commended them to the Lord (as in verse 22). This may have been done in connection with the appointment of elders, but not necessarily so. Prayer and fasting, like commending Christians to the Lord, is not limited to the time when elders are appointed. I suspect the point is that all this was done in general while Paul and Barnabas were present, not just in some ceremony for appointing elders. Nevertheless, prayer and fasting are good things to do as elders are appointed.

14:24-26 – The preachers returned to Antioch of Syria.

Having gone back through these areas where they had established churches, Paul and Barnabas then continued their journey back to Antioch of Syria. They passed through the regions of Pisidia and Pamphylia (see *map*). Nothing is said about preaching in those areas except in Perga (which was in Pamphylia – 13:13). There they preached the word, though nothing is said about the result.

They went from Perga to the seacoast town of Attalia (see *map*). From there they sailed to Antioch, the place where they had begun this journey (13:1ff). They had begun the work trusting in God's grace, and by His grace they had completed it.

14:27,28 – Paul and Barnabas reported the results of their trip to the church in Antioch.

Having arrived at Antioch, they gathered the church and reported about the work God had done through them. Especially they told how their preaching had led to faith and conversions among the Gentiles. Following this, they stayed in Antioch a long time.

A local church should be interested in the work done by the preachers they support or send out, and preachers should tell the churches openly about the work they do. This is not a matter of bragging since the

glory really goes to God anyway. They rehearsed what **God** had done with them.

Members need to be aware about the work that is done by the men they support. They should be interested in the progress of the gospel. They need to make sure the men they send and support are standing for the truth. Often they can make helpful suggestions and give encouragement about the work. And knowing about the work encourages them to want to do more of it. It is both Scriptural and good for churches to conduct congregational assemblies for the purpose of reporting to the church about the results of work they are involved in.

Acts 15

The Dispute Concerning Circumcision – 15:1-35

15:1-5 - The Decision to Send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem

15:1 – Men from Judea taught that circumcision is necessary to salvation.

While Paul and Barnabas were at Antioch, men from Judea came and taught that people must be circumcised, as taught by Moses, in order to be saved. Note the issue as stated by the men. It was not just a matter of circumcision for good health or as a social custom without religious significance or even as a way of avoiding offense to Jews (compare 16:3; 1 Corinthians 9:19ff). The doctrine was that circumcision was ***essential to salvation*** as a religious rite. In verse 5 they state that the whole Law of Moses must be kept.

This was the position of the Judaizers in the church. These people claimed to be followers of Jesus according to the gospel. But they thought the gospel was an ***addition to*** the Law of Moses, not a ***re-placement*** for it. They thought ***everyone must keep both laws***.

It is difficult to conceive of a more basic issue. Circumcision was the special sign of Judaism. It separated Jews from Gentiles (Genesis 17). To bind it on men would be to make the gospel a Jewish national religion: one must become a Jew and submit to the law given to Jews in order to be a Christian. The issue is whether the gospel by itself alone can save people, or must we all keep the Old Law along with the gospel to be saved? (Compare Romans 1:16; Mark 16:15,16.)

This issue plagued the early church throughout the first century and is dealt with in many books: Romans, Galatians, Hebrews, Ephesians 2, Colossians 2, etc. Yet, there are still people today who want to combine the gospel with at least parts of the Old Law. They want to bind such Old Testament practices as the seventh-day Sabbath (which was also a special sign to the Jews – Exodus 19,20,31, etc.), tithing, special priesthood, etc. Still others keep the Jewish feast days or holy days. Others may not

require keeping the law, but yet they turn to it for authority for practices nowhere found in the New Testament such as instrumental music in worship, incense, etc. The resolution reached in Acts 15 is important for us to understand for many reasons.

15:2 – Paul and Barnabas were sent to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem about the issue.

Paul and Barnabas had taught and converted many Gentiles. They had never required these non-Jewish people to keep the Old Law, be circumcised, etc. They obviously held the conviction that keeping the Old Law was not necessary. They were determined that their work not be undermined. As a result they had “no small dissension and dispute” with these Judaizers. That means they had a big dispute with them!

Note that brethren do disagree at times, even in the church.

It is simply not true, as some folks believe, that the church should never have any disagreements, issues should not be debated, and we can solve all problems by “loving one another” and overlooking our differences (doctrinal compromise). Paul and Barnabas did not overlook this difference. Some problems are the result of attitude problems and can be resolved by learning to act in love. But other problems are doctrinal disagreements and can only be resolved by studying God’s word. Differences should be confronted, not ignored, sugarcoated, or swept under the rug.

On the other hand, not all differences should lead to churches splintering and going their separate ways. Differences must be confronted in love according to the standard of God’s word. Sometimes the result will be that the problem can be peaceably resolved. In other cases brethren persist in their views, so strong opposition must be given. In some cases brethren become definite false teachers who will not repent and must be withdrawn from. This eventually became the case with some of these Judaizers (Rom 16:17,18; Titus 3:10,11).

In the instance under consideration, when no agreement could be reached, it was decided to send Paul and Barnabas, along with other men, to go speak to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem about this matter.

Why was this approach used to resolve the problem?

Why couldn’t everybody just accept the conclusion of Paul, since he was an inspired apostle? Some claim this proves that Jerusalem was the Mother Church (like Rome is today) and Peter was the first Pope so they had to appeal to his authority. Others say this was the first church conference and authorizes the church today to have conferences and church headquarters to settle doctrinal disputes for the church.

Not all the reasons for the meeting have been revealed at this point in Luke’s account, but as we proceed and as we consider other passages,

we will learn more about the reasons. At this point note that they went to Jerusalem to speak to the apostles and elders. There is no indication any other churches sent representatives. This was not a universal council. The apostles had direct revelation and universal authority, but we no longer have apostles living on earth today. The elders had authority in the church where the false teachers came from. So, the following appear to be the reasons for approaching the matter as was done, and we will enlarge on the reasons as the story proceeds:

1) As discussed in Acts 10, just because inspired men had received revelation, that did not mean people understood it. In fact, it was possible for the inspired man to receive the revelation and yet not understand the proper application of it. They had to study and meditate on the revelation just like we have received the Bible but must study diligently to understand the proper application of it.

2) Some people disputed Paul's apostleship. This appears to especially be the case among the Judaizers. They appeared to accept the authority of the original apostles (who had emphasized teaching Jews), but not of Paul, who had emphasized teaching Gentiles (see Galatians 2). Paul knew the truth, but others even in Antioch may have doubted whether or not his teaching was the same as that of the other apostles. Going to the apostles in Jerusalem would show that all the apostles taught the same about this.

3) Perhaps foremost, the men teaching this false doctrine had come from Judea (see verse 1 and later notes). Paul and Barnabas were determined to straighten out any harmful influence coming from the Jerusalem church in this matter. It was not just a matter of straightening out these men who had come from Antioch. But since the men came from Jerusalem, the apostles and the church there needed to stand for the truth and correct their influence in this matter, otherwise their influence might lead other people there and elsewhere into error. We will discuss this further as the evidence unfolds.

No one should conclude that Paul went because he did not know for sure what the truth was on the issue. Galatians 2:2 says he went up by revelation. He went to make sure that the church in Jerusalem straightened out their influence and to make sure the other apostles and the Jerusalem elders did all that they could to prevent the Judaizers from spreading their influence among other churches, as they were already doing in Antioch.

The connection between Acts 15 and Galatians 2

Surely Galatians 2 must refer to the same meeting in Jerusalem mentioned in Acts 15. The two accounts each give some details that are omitted in the other account, but that is to be expected. There are no real contradictions, and there are simply too many coincidences for these to be two separate meetings:

* Both passages refer to meetings in Jerusalem.

* Both involved Paul and Barnabas going to Jerusalem.

* Both involved meetings with the leaders of the church in Jerusalem, specifically Peter and James.

* In both cases, the issue was whether or not circumcision should be bound on Gentiles.

* In both cases, the meeting was necessitated by people who had agitated the view that circumcision was necessary.

* In both cases, the decision was that such would not be necessary.

The chances are minuscule that two such conferences occurred in close approximation. Why would a second meeting be needed? Both accounts show clearly that the meeting concluded with complete agreement among the inspired men. To have a second such meeting so soon afterward would be senseless. I conclude that these are two accounts of the same meeting.

The only problem with such a view is that Acts 11:27-30 and 12:25 shows that Paul had been to Jerusalem another time between his visit in Acts 9 and the meeting in Acts 15. Why did Paul not mention this in Galatians?

I believe the answer is not difficult. He is giving this history to answer a particular argument or complaint. He is showing that his doctrine came from Jesus, not from men (the apostles in particular). In Galatians he has already established the answer to that by showing he had been preaching for three years before he even met an apostle.

Then he turned to another aspect of the question and that is whether or not the other apostles agreed with his view. That is answered by the Acts 15 meeting. But the Acts 11/12 visit to Jerusalem is irrelevant to Paul's point. It came after he had already met Peter and James, so would prove nothing more about the source of his teaching. And the purpose of that visit was to deliver gifts for needy saints, not to discuss circumcision. The visit was apparently irrelevant to the issue in Galatians, so he simply ignored it.

15:3,4 – Paul and Barnabas reported their work among the Gentiles.

Paul and Barnabas traveled to Jerusalem, visiting churches on the way and telling of their work in converting Gentiles. This caused great joy to the brethren.

When they arrived at Jerusalem they told the church, the apostles, and the elders there about their work, no doubt including the conversion of the Gentiles as they had told along the way.

15:5 – Some of the sect of the Pharisees insisted the Gentile converts must obey the law.

As in Antioch, so in Jerusalem there were certain Christians, who had been Pharisees, who claimed that these converted Gentiles must necessarily be circumcised and must be commanded to keep the Law of

Moses. Note again that the issue is stated similarly to v1. These people believed that keeping circumcision and the law were “necessary,” something “commanded” to be done. It was essential to please God.

In so saying, they raised the very issue that Paul and Barnabas had come to Jerusalem to discuss. It appears indeed that the men, who had gone to Antioch from Judea (verse 1), had received their ideas from some in the church in Jerusalem. This was exactly why it needed to be dealt with in Jerusalem. See notes on Galatians 2.

15:6-21 - The Conference with the Apostles and Elders

15:6 – A meeting of the apostles and elders was called to consider the issue.

The question that had been raised (see verses 1,5) was considered in a meeting of the apostles and elders (see also Galatians 2). These are the very people Paul and Barnabas went to see (verse 2). Note that there is no evidence that the whole church attended the meeting. Nor is there any indication that people from other churches were invited. Nothing here describes a universal conference. Rather, people from **two** churches met to discuss a difference that arose in teaching between people from these two churches.

The meeting began with preliminary discussions about which we are told little except that there was “much dispute” (verse 7). Again, the solution to differences between brethren is to meet and study together what God’s word says in an attitude of love and humility.

We are then told of specific speeches made by three men that appear to bring the matter to a head so a conclusion could be reached.

Who was included in this meeting?

Verse 6 says the apostles and elders came together to consider the matter. This was clearly a different meeting from verses 4,5.

As described above, I personally conclude this is **the same meeting as described in Galatians 2:1-10 – a private meeting** between Paul and Barnabas and the leading men at Jerusalem.

Essentially everything fits such a conclusion. Verse 6 says the “apostles and elders came together.” If the whole church was present, why doesn’t it say so as in verse 4? In verse 13 James addressed those present as “men and brethren.” 16:4 says “the apostles and elders” made the decision (If so, then they met later with the church and presented their conclusion to them – verse 22.)

The only contextual problem with this view is that verse 12 says “the multitude” was present. This sounds like a large crowd. However, the word here is not the usual word for a crowd (οχλος). The word here (πληθος) can mean a large number, but basically carries the idea of “fulness” (Vine). Used with the article, as here, it means “the whole number, the whole multitude, the assemblage” (Thayer) – i.e., the whole of the

group under consideration. It is not necessarily hundreds or thousands of people.

Context must indicate what the group is the “fulness” of which is referred to. The word can be used for a local church when the context so indicates (Acts 4:32; 6:2,5; 15:30). But John 21:6 uses the word to refer to 153 fish (verse 11). Acts 23:7 uses it for the “assembly” (NKJV) of the Sanhedrin council – a deliberating body. Acts 28:3 – Paul carried a “bundle” of sticks (perhaps a dozen or two?). James 5:20 – Converting a “brother” from error covers a “multitude” of sins (the full number he is guilty of, not necessarily hundreds).

Similarly, I believe it is valid to call the “private” meeting of Galatians 2:1-10 and Acts 15:6-21 a “multitude.” It included Paul and Barnabas and those who came with them (verse 2), the apostles, at least some of the Judaizers (Acts 15:7; Galatians 2:5,6?), and the elders of a huge congregation (which probably consisted of thousands of people). This could easily constitute a “multitude,” the fullness of which listened to Paul and Barnabas.

Nevertheless, **suppose the whole church was present in the meeting described here in verses 6-21.** If so, then this must be a different meeting that occurred *after* the private meeting in Galatians 2. This necessarily follows since Paul said in Galatians 2 that he met privately with the leaders lest he had run in vain (2:2). He wanted to make sure the issue would be resolved properly before it became a public issue (a perfectly valid reason for having private decision meetings!).

So, if the church was present in Acts 15:6-21, then this was *not* the meeting where the decisions were made. The authorized leaders of the congregation had already made the decision in private. The verses 6-21 meeting then must have been to *explain* to the congregation the reasons for the decision and try to convince those who had disagreed (verse 7).

In any case, Galatians 2 proves conclusively that the decisions were made in a private meeting that did not include the whole church, nor are any women mentioned as being included. And note that everyone who spoke in every meeting mentioned was a man! *If* the women were a part of the “men and brethren” of Acts 15:13, there is no proof here that any women spoke to the group.

So if the whole church is included in the meeting of Acts 15:6-21, then we may compare this to the setting of a modern public “debate” in which a church arranges a meeting for men of opposing views to express their ideas in the presence of the whole congregation. But it was not a decision-making meeting, since the stand the church would take had already been decided. In any case, women, if present, did not speak out to the group, but remained silent as 1 Corinthians 14 teaches.

15:7-11 – Peter’s testimony

15:7 – Peter reminded the group of the revelations he received regarding the conversion of the first Gentile converts.

After there had been much dispute, Peter told the group about the conversion of Cornelius and his household. Peter’s arguments were basically the same as in 11:1-18 (see notes there) when he had been questioned about the conversion of the Gentiles, though the account here gives less detail than Acts 11. He said God chose him to be the first to preach the gospel to Gentiles that they might believe. It follows that, in teaching that Gentiles must obey the law and be circumcised to be saved, the Judaizers were not rejecting just the teaching of Paul. They were also rejecting the teaching of Peter, who had baptized Gentiles and accepted them as Christians without requiring them to keep the law or be circumcised.

Note the connection, as always, between hearing the gospel and believing. People believe on the basis of the gospel message, not on the basis of some direct action of the Holy Spirit apart from the gospel.

Catholicism claims that Peter spoke as Pope here and settled the issue for the church. The context shows this is clearly false. Peter was neither the first speaker nor the last. It was actually James whose speech seemed to bring the matter to a conclusion. Peter is presented with no more authority than any other apostle. He was simply one of the apostles who attended and spoke, as did several others. The final decision was made by all the apostles and elders, guided by the Holy Spirit (verses 22,28).

15:8,9 – God gave the Gentiles the Holy Spirit and purified their hearts by faith, just as was done for Jews.

Peter’s main argument was the activity of the Holy Spirit. God gave the Spirit to the Gentiles as He did to the Jews. This was God’s acknowledgment or witness (ASV) regarding the hearts of these Gentiles, for God knows the hearts of men.

Note that the Holy Spirit was given miraculously, not to save the Gentiles nor even to tell them how to be saved, but to bear witness or provide evidence that they could receive forgiveness of sins. They were actually saved by their faith (verse 9) according to God’s grace (verse 11) when they heard the word of the gospel (verse 7). This included repentance (11:18) and baptism (10:47,48).

Peter concluded that God made no distinction between Jew and Gentile. The distinctions made under the law were now gone (Ephesians 2; Galatians 2). The gospel provided the means for their hearts to be cleansed by faith. Peter had taught them and he knew what he had been guided by the Spirit to teach and what the people had obeyed. God had not required these Gentiles to be circumcised or keep any other tenets of the law in addition to the gospel.

God had made no distinction between uncircumcised Gentiles (“them”) and circumcised Jews (“us”). The gospel requirements in both cases were the same. The critical point is that the Gentiles were not required to additionally submit to circumcision and the law (as the Judaizers contended must be done). Peter simply taught them the gospel and baptized them; he did not require them to be circumcised or submit to the law. And yet it was clear that God accepted them. And all of this was confirmed to be correct by the miracles done by the Holy Spirit at the time. Would the Spirit do these miracles if Peter had taught the people error? The purpose of miracles was to confirm the message to be from God (14:3; etc.). See notes on 11:1-18 for further details.

15:10,11 – Jews and Gentiles will both be saved by grace without the unbearable burden of the old law.

Peter then stated that those who were binding the law on Gentiles were putting a yoke on their necks that no Jew of any age had been able to bear. In doing this, they were testing God.

The law was an unbearable yoke because it could not provide forgiveness such that sins were no longer remembered (see Galatians 5:1; 3:21ff; 2 Corinthians 3:6ff; Colossians 2:14-17; Romans 3:20ff; Hebrews 10:1ff). The law was a yoke, not in that it was impossible to keep (Jesus did keep it), but because no one in practice *did* keep it except Jesus. And when one violated it, the whole force of the law condemned him, yet the law ultimately could do nothing about that condemnation. Animal sacrifices could not take away sins, but the person was just held guilty again later and had to offer another sacrifice. The gospel provides the better sacrifice of Jesus by which sins are remembered no more (Hebrews 10:1-18). So why would anyone want to go back to that old unbearable yoke?

So, the Gentiles will be saved by grace through Jesus, which does not necessitate obedience to the Law (John 1:17; Hebrews 10:1-10; 7:11-14; 8:6-13; 9:1-4; 2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Galatians 3:24,25; 5:1-6; Romans 7:1-7; Ephesians 2:11-16; Colossians 2:13-17). But the gospel saves Jews in the same way it does Gentiles. So even the Jews no longer had to keep the law. They were all free from that yoke!

Note that, as in Acts 10 and 11, Peter reached all these conclusions by ***approved apostolic example*** (the example of his teaching to Cornelius) ***and necessary inference***. Not one of his conclusions had been directly stated by God regarding the matter. Yet he reached the conclusion, taught it to others, expected others to accept and understand it just as he had, and said those who did not accept it were testing God. The event here proves conclusively that it is valid to establish doctrine by means of Bible examples and necessary inferences.

Note: This is the last time the Apostle Peter is ever mentioned in the book of Acts.

15:12 – Paul and Barnabas told about the signs and wonders done through them among the Gentiles.

Next, Barnabas and Paul told about their work in converting the Gentiles. Like Peter, they too had preached to many Gentiles, baptizing multitudes, but they had never bound circumcision or the law as a requirement of salvation on the Gentiles (see verses 1,2).

Their description of the miracles and wonders God worked through them among the Gentiles is critical because, as always, the purpose of miracles was to confirm the message preached as being from God (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3,4; etc.). So they taught Gentiles to be saved without teaching them to be circumcised or keep the law, yet God confirmed their message by miracles. Why would God do miracles by the hands of these men if they were teaching error to these Gentiles?

Again, their argument is not based on express statement from God that Gentiles could be saved without circumcision, but on their own apostolic example approved by God by the miracles done through them as they taught these people. So, they drew a necessary inference from an apostolic example, and disputed and opposed anyone who would not accept that conclusion. We can and should use examples and necessary inferences similarly.

Regarding the term “multitude,” see on v6 above.

15:13-21 – The testimony of James

15:13,14 – The final recorded speech was made by James.

Apparently, this James was the Lord’s brother (Galatians 1:19; Mark 6:3), or it could be another apostle named James (Acts 1:13). It cannot be James the brother of John, for he had been killed by Herod in 12:1,2,17.

James referred back to Peter’s statement concerning his preaching to the Gentiles. James said this was God visiting the Gentiles to take out from them a people for His name. Some of them began to be a part of God’s people, wearing His name.

15:15-18 – James quoted from the prophet Amos that Gentiles would be called by the name of God.

James then proceeded to quote direct Old Testament prophecies which confirmed that God had intended all along for the Gentiles to receive the gospel. Note that here we are shown a valid use of Old Testament Scripture. The whole question at issue was whether or not people are required to obey the Old Law. Yet James used the prophecies to show that the law would be changed and to help New Testament Christians understand God’s will in the New Testament.

Verses 16-18 quote Amos 9:11,12, which describes the tabernacle of David, which had fallen, being built up again. A tabernacle is a house or dwelling place. The term can refer to the household or people of David, like we today are God’s house or temple. The reference most likely is to

the restoration of David's line of kings as rulers of God's people. This had fallen in that his sons were not serving as kings, but was rebuilt in that the Messiah would rule as David's descendant. (Others say the tabernacle is the church itself, but the point is the same. It is a reference to the restored kingdom.)

In this restored kingdom, the rest (residue – ASV) of mankind would seek the Lord and be called by God's name. Gentiles would be considered God's people right along with the Jews. This confirmed what Peter, Paul, and Barnabas had just said.

Amos' account actually says the residue of "Edom," not man. This is one of the few textual variations that affect the meaning. The difference is Edom vs. Adam (man). But the end result of the meaning is the same. The point is that people other than Jews would be part of the Messiah's restored kingdom. And this is confirmed by Amos' use of the word "Gentiles" later in the quote.

All this was done by the Lord according to His will. In fact, it agreed with His eternal plan for man from before the world began. He had always intended for salvation to be for all men.

15:19 – James then reached the conclusion that they should not "trouble" the Gentiles who were converted to God.

Obviously, this meant they should not require the Gentiles to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses, since that was the issue being discussed. So, James was agreeing with the position stated by Peter, Barnabas, and Paul. The result was to repudiate the views of the Judaizing Pharisees in the church.

15:20,21 – However, there were certain rules, James said, that it would still be good to instruct the Gentiles to respect.

These included several things they were to abstain from: (1) things polluted by idols, (2) fornication, (3) things that had been strangled, and (4) blood.

The Law of Moses had strictly forbid everything James listed. This law had been read for many generations every Sabbath in the Jewish synagogues, so every Jew knew better than to practice them. Yet, Gentiles commonly practiced all of them. James had said the Gentiles should not be troubled by keeping the things that had been simply part of the law. But these things were still to be bound.

His conclusion, therefore, must mean that these teachings were also part of the new law and they should be reinforced to these Gentiles. Gentiles should not be led to believe that they could continue to live as they always had. There were some things that Jews had been observing which were also bound by God in the gospel, and these the Gentiles must observe. But the things that were just part of the Old Law, but not in the New Law, were not to be bound.

Note more closely the things James said were still binding.

They are listed again in verses 28,29, where they are called “necessary” things.

(1) Verse 29 explains that “things polluted by idols” means meats that have been sacrificed to idols. Paul discussed these further at length in 1 Corinthians 8 & 10. It was sinful to eat meats offered to idols as an act of worship to the idol or to participate in a worship assembly to an idol. It was **not** sinful to eat just for nourishment, but it would be sinful to eat (regardless of the intent) if done in such a way as to lead people to think you believe it is all right to worship the idol. Such would be a bad influence or stumbling block.

(2) “Fornication” means all types of illicit sexual relationships between people who are not Scripturally married and therefore have no right to the sexual union. This would include premarital sex, extramarital sex (adultery), homosexuality, bestiality, etc. Gentiles often practiced these immoralities, including in worship of their idols; so James urged Gentile converts be warned against such.

(3) “Blood” – Note that the whole point in context is that these things, which were forbidden by the law, are still forbidden by the gospel; so Gentile converts should be taught to avoid them. The rest of the New Testament says virtually nothing about this point (compare Acts 21:25), yet James is clearly saying that this practice is forbidden in the New Testament. To understand the meaning of the restriction, we must study the Old Testament law to which James refers. Since the New Testament law is clearly the same on this point as was the Old Testament, we can accept the Old Testament definition of the law.

What the law said was that people were forbidden to eat flesh with the blood in it, but were to pour the blood out. See Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 3:17; 19:26; 17:10-15; Deuteronomy 12:16,23-28; 15:23; 1 Samuel 14:31ff. Further, they were not to directly eat blood of any animal – Leviticus 7:26,27; 17:10ff; Deuteronomy 12:23.

The reason for this is that the life is in the blood, and the blood is offered as the atoning sacrifice – Leviticus 17:10-14; Deuteronomy 12:23-28. The wages of sin is death, and death is described as the shedding of blood. Since blood then is the requirement of sin, Jesus today is still our sacrifice having shed His blood for us. The conclusion is that we today are not to eat blood since Jesus shed His blood for us.

The point is not that the meat we eat must not have even a single drop of blood in it. It would be impossible to remove every corpuscle. The point is that we are not to deliberately eat blood for the sake of eating blood as a food. Reasonable precautions are to be used to remove the blood, draining it from the animal, “pouring it out.” This is to be done at the time the animal is killed, and is done so in slaughtering animals today. Cooking meat also tends to cook out the blood.

Note further that, contrary to Jehovah's Witness' doctrine, nothing here prevents taking blood transfusions. When the Old Testament explanation is studied it becomes clear that what is condemned is **eating** blood as a food, not taking it intravenously as a medicine to save lives in time of emergency. The Scriptures and all people recognize the difference between eating or drinking something as a food for the pleasure of it and taking the same thing for medical treatment (see 1 Timothy 5:23).

(4) "Things strangled" refers to meat that is killed by strangling. This is wrong because the blood would remain in it and to eat it would be eating the meat with the blood. There would be no "shedding of blood." This is discussed in the Old Testament passages listed above.

Some people argue that the intent was not to say that these practices are all inherently sinful but only that they should not be done when they might cause a stumbling block to Jews.

We are told that this is the point of verse 21, the same as in 1 Corinthians 8,9,10. The practices were not forbidden as such, but only when Gentiles were around Jews who would be caused to stumble because of the background they grew up in. The bottom line of this argument is that eating blood is not forbidden in societies where no one is offended by it religiously.

This view is unacceptable for the following reasons:

(1) The entire purpose of this meeting was to consider the binding nature of the Old Law (verses 1,5,6). The group had determined to write to the Gentiles that circumcision was not binding. In such a context, if they were to say other requirements of the law **should** be kept, the conclusion would naturally be that those things **are** binding (in contrast to circumcision). If they did not really mean these things were forbidden, but just a matter of influence, they should most definitely have made the distinction clear. But there is nothing in the letter they sent to make this distinction clear at all.

(2) The letter they sent actually states just the opposite of the view we are discussing. It says that those who bound the law were not speaking what was authorized (verse 24). The apostles, etc., wanted to avoid unnecessary burdens on the Gentiles, but the things they were forbidding were "**necessary** things" (verses 28,29). This necessarily means that these rules are binding, not just matters of influence.

(3) In 16:4 the letter is said to include "**decrees**" the churches were to keep as "ordained" (ASV) by the apostles and elders, as guided by the Holy Spirit (15:28). Who would take this to mean the things listed are not forbidden but are just matters of influence?

(4) "Fornication" is also in the list. Was it just a matter of influence, but not forbidden of itself? Clearly, it is inherently sinful, so how could it be included in the list if the list just meant to avoid being stumbling blocks in matters of indifference?

(5) Specifically regarding eating blood, the **reason** the law forbade the practice was that the life is in the blood, and blood was shed for remission of sins. This principle still applies today since we today are saved by the shedding of Jesus' blood. So, it perfectly harmonizes with the New Testament teaching about Jesus' blood that we are still not to eat blood today.

(6) Eating meats offered to idols **was** an act of sin of itself **as the Gentiles were accustomed to do it**. It was not just a matter of influence. They did it as an act of worship to idols, and that was inherently sinful and is forbidden as such in 1 Corinthians 8,10 by Paul and other writers. Paul later explained further such meats could be eaten as food when no harmful influence occurred, but that was not the issue in Acts 15 and is never addressed there.

As we explained earlier, verse 21 more likely means that Gentiles needed special instructions in these matters because they were accustomed to practice these things. By the teaching of the law, Jews knew for generations these things were wrong, so they did not need special instruction in them. However, unless they were taught otherwise, Gentiles might conclude that these practices are all right now because the Old Law is not binding. The point is they should be told that, whereas the Old Law was not binding, yet the laws against these things were in effect in the gospel and must still be obeyed.

This is also an important principle for us to understand today. The Old Testament is no longer binding, but that does not mean we can practice all things that the Old Testament forbade. If the New Testament also forbids those practices, then we must avoid them because the New Testament so teaches.

15:22-29 - The Letter to Antioch and Elsewhere

15:22,23 – To communicate the conclusion reached, a letter was sent along with men to confirm it.

The evidence present by the recorded speeches all confirmed the same conclusion: It was not necessary for people to be circumcised or to keep the Old Law to be saved. This conclusion had been established by necessary inference, approved example, and direct statement (in the prophecy James cited, although even this required making inferences to get the point).

The inspired evidence all led to the same conclusion, so the apostles and elders reached a decision. Remember that Galatians 2 said this decision was originally reached by the leaders in private. When this conclusion was revealed to the church, then the group – apostles, elders, and the whole church – was pleased to send chosen men to Antioch (and other affected places), along with a letter to explain the decision (v22). This was needed since the Antioch church had asked the Jerusalem

church about the people from Jerusalem who had gone to Antioch teaching that the law was binding on Gentiles (15:1,24). The men chosen to go were Silas and Judas (called Barsabas).

Did women speak in a church meeting that had the power to ratify or invalidate the decision that had been reached?

Verse 22 says the decision “pleased” the whole group. Verse 25 says it “seemed good” to them, “being assembled with one accord,” to send the chosen men. Verse 28 says “it seemed good” to them and to the Holy Spirit. Some claim this proves the whole church (including women) participated and spoke up in the decision of verses 6-21, or at least that they participated in the decision to send men and the letter. Some even claim that the church had to ratify the decision by group consensus, and if the church had not agreed, that would have nullified the decision. Consider:

1. Remember, this was a meeting of **apostles** and elders (15:6; 16:4). Must the church ratify the decisions of the apostles? If not, then how can this passage be used to prove the church must ratify the decisions of elders or of men (if there are no elders)? You cannot use this passage to prove consensus of the whole church is needed to approve the decisions of elders and/or men until such time as you are prepared to use the passage to prove that consensus of the whole church is needed to approve the decisions of apostles!

2. But remember, we already proved that the main decisions had been made in a private meeting before the church as a whole was ever involved. So, we still have authority here for a group of authorized leaders to meet apart from the whole church to make decisions.

3. Verses 22,25,28 say only that the whole group was “pleased” by the decision and it “seemed good” to them. That simply indicates that the church appreciated the decision made by the leaders, accepted it, and **submitted** to it. It does not prove they made the decision, or that the decision would not have been binding if they were not “pleased” by it.

Compare this to verse 31 that says the multitude of the disciples in Antioch “rejoiced” when they received and read this letter. Does that prove that all the members, including the women, spoke up in a congregational meeting and expressed their joy? Why does no one so argue? Likewise, in 2 Chronicles 24:8-10, all the people rejoiced when the king gave a command. Does this prove everyone spoke out to the group right then, or does it simply mean they recognized it as a good command?

4. Verse 23 also says “**they**” wrote a letter. Does this mean that the whole group met together and composed the letter in a meeting of the whole group, with everyone expressing his/her views about the contents, each one writing part of it, etc.? Who can believe it? So then why does the language require that the decision to **send** the letter and the men had to be made in a meeting with everyone present, etc.?

5. Verse 28 says it “seemed good” to them and to the Holy Spirit to teach as they did. Does this prove the Holy Spirit attended a congregational meeting, and if the Spirit’s decision had not “seemed good” to the congregation, they could have changed it? Did the Spirit need their consensus in order for its decisions to stand? If not, then why argue that verses 22ff mean the decision of the apostles and elders needed the approval of the whole church, etc.?

6. Suppose I discuss with my wife about what house we will buy. Then we meet with the children and reveal our decision. If my family, including the children, is “pleased” by the decision and it “seems good” to them, does that prove the children actually made the decision or had the right to invalidate the decision if they were not pleased by it? Or does it require only that the parents made the decision and the children accepted it?

7. The fact the men who were sent are called “chosen men,” does not prove who actually made the decision to choose them, let alone where or how the decision was made. Someone chose them, but we are not told who or how.

8. Suppose the congregation had not been “pleased” with the decisions of their God-ordained leaders. Could they have nullified the decisions with God’s approval? Where does this passage or any New Testament passage ever say such a thing? I know of no such passage.

Think about it. Here is a Bible example showing that the church was “pleased” with the decisions of its God-ordained leaders. If that teaches anything, it teaches that the church ought to be satisfied with the decisions of their leaders and submit to them. The inspired example is that the church **accepted** the decision of its leaders. Yet, brethren take that passage and conclude it authorizes them to be **displeased** with the decisions of the leaders and **reject** them as not binding! How can it be handling the word aright to use a Bible example to teach the very opposite of what it says? This whole argument smells suspiciously like a thinly disguised effort to justify rebellion!

9. However, I do know of several Old Testament passages where the congregation of God’s people was **not** pleased with the decisions of their God-ordained leaders and tried to nullify those decisions. You can read about God’s reaction in passages like Numbers 13,14, and 16.

The truth is that the Spirit determined the doctrinal aspects of the decisions, the inspired men revealed them, the authorized leaders discussed them and made the other necessary decisions, some of these decisions being made in private. The congregation then accepted the decisions of the Spirit and of its leaders. That is what the passage states, and nothing beyond that can be proved by it.

10. Above all, **there is nothing here that says that women spoke in a group meeting of the whole congregation to make these decisions.** The idea simply contradicts what the passage says.

Every person who spoke in every meeting described was a male. Where does the passage say any woman spoke? It simply is not there. The fact the church was “pleased” does not prove women spoke up. People are often “pleased” without speaking out to say so in a church meeting.

Summary

Ask this: Who was “pleased” with the decision or to whom did it “seem good”? We have seen that it was the church, the elders, the apostles, and the Holy Spirit. Questions:

1) Did any of these have authority over any others to make or reveal decisions that others must obey? Apostles? Holy Spirit? If some did have that authority, then “pleased” and “seemed good” cannot mean in this context that others have the right to be displeased and negate the decisions of those in authority.

2) Were any of these people expected to submit to decisions that others made, even if they were not permitted to reject or negate the decision? If some were required to submit and had no right to negate the decision, then “pleased” and “seemed good” cannot mean in this context that everyone mentioned had the right to be displeased and negate the decisions of others.

3) Did all these have equal voice in the decision? Did some have the right to make and bind a decision even if others disliked the decision? If some did have that right, then “pleased” and “seemed good” cannot mean in this context that others have the right to be displeased and negate the decisions of others.

The bottom line means we have example after example in Scripture in which men spoke in congregational assemblies, but not one example in which a woman ever spoke with God’s approval. Why then should we assume they are free to speak in such meetings when 1 Corinthians 14:34,35 expressly forbids it and no example anywhere permits it? (Yes, women spoke in small group meetings, but where is the authority for them to speak when the whole church is assembled for congregational activities, including decision making?)

For a further discussion of a related passages, see notes on Acts 6:6.

15:24 – The letter stated the issue: Men from Jerusalem had taught that people must keep the Old Law.

The letter began by stating the reason for writing. Certain men had gone out from the midst of the church in Jerusalem teaching things they had not been authorized to teach, causing trouble for the Gentiles.

Here we learn quite clearly the reason why the Jerusalem brethren were involved in this discussion and the reason they wrote a letter to other people about it. The influence of the apostles and the Jerusalem church (led by its elders) was at stake! People teaching error had come from their midst. This could easily have led to the conclusion that the church, the elders, and even the apostles agreed with the teaching. This

obligated them to take a stand for what was right; they must clear their reputation, and oppose the error.

Nothing here authorizes men today to call councils to settle doctrinal disputes for all the churches. The apostles were inspired and did have responsibility for all the churches, but we no longer have apostles today; instead we have their written word to settle all disputes (2 Timothy 3:16,17). The Jerusalem church, with her local elders, had no supervision elsewhere; but they did have a duty to stand for the truth, clear their reputation, and refute any harmful influence that might have come from their midst.

Nothing more than this can be proved by this example. Churches have a right to communicate with one another about where they stand, to admonish one another, and to conduct meetings to accomplish these purposes. They have no Scriptural right to call area-wide meetings to establish doctrine or policy and enforce their decisions on others.

People who argue that this example justifies a central headquarters for the church have missed the point. And in fact they do not follow the passage anyway. Do they resolve their disputes by calling meetings of qualified apostles and the elders of the church in Jerusalem, directly guided by the Holy Spirit (verse 28)? If not, then this passage does them no good! In truth, denominations just use this passage as a cloak to set up their own headquarters consisting of men who have not the qualifications of apostles, are not from Jerusalem, are not directly guided by the Holy Spirit, and generally don't even have the qualifications of bishops (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1)!

Note that the letter plainly rejected the teaching of the Judaizers and exonerated Paul and Barnabas. It said they had given no such command as what the Judaizers taught. Here is stated the principle of the "silence of Scripture." The Judaizers were wrong, but not because God had directly stated that one did **not** have to be circumcised, etc. They were wrong simply because such a doctrine was nowhere taught in the New Testament.

There was no need to prove that the view of the Judaizers had been expressly forbidden. They were wrong simply because they taught positions for which they had no authority. Wouldn't the same thing apply to the Sabbath and every other specific Old Testament command that is not included in the New Testament? They are not binding because "there is no such command" in the New Testament requiring them. This is exactly what the Lord's people have always taught about authority based on passages such as Matthew 15:9,13; Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Colossians 3:17; Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; 3:5,6; Revelation 22:18,19.

15:25-27 – Barnabas and Paul were expressly endorsed.

Having repudiated the Judaizers, the letter then praised Paul and Barnabas as beloved men who had risked their lives for the cause of Christ. Then it proceeded to explain their intent to send Judas and Silas

to confirm the letter. We will read more about these men and their work of confirming the letter later (verses 32).

It is interesting that they claimed to be acting with one accord. Yet, one wonders exactly what the Judaizing teachers thought about this. The position of the Judaizers continued to arise to plague the early church again and again. So, did the Judaizers in Jerusalem accept the truth at this point but later changed their minds, or did other men elsewhere stir up the same issue? Or did they just keep quiet for a while because all the evidence was against them and they had nothing else they could do? Or does “one accord” mean some people disagreed but the people God had placed in the leadership had decided and so others accepted it? The answer is not given.

15:28,29 – The Gentiles were required to keep those teachings that are bound by the New Testament.

The letter then stated the conclusion, exactly as discussed at length earlier (see notes on verse 20). Note again that the things listed are “necessary things” for them to practice. (The letter did not mean that these are the only necessary things under the gospel to please God, for we know from other Scriptures that much more is expected. The point must be that, of the specific practices that were in dispute on this occasion, these are the only ones God still required.)

It is interesting that the Sabbath is not mentioned as one of the “necessary things.” Surely it would have been included as part of keeping the law (verse 24). One would have surely expected it to be included among the items in dispute, yet it is not included in the things from the Old Testament that were still to be bound under the gospel. Paul confirmed this conclusion stating plainly in Colossians 2:14,16 that the Sabbath is not binding today.

Note in particular that they appeal to the power of the Holy Spirit. The speakers had mentioned the revelations and miracles of the Spirit. But this phrase shows clearly that the message of this letter was the teaching of God, not just the human ideas of the men who wrote it. They were not appealing to human wisdom, but to God’s will. They were just agreeing with what God said about it.

This also shows why apostles were consulted. They were inspired. The Bible had not yet been written, so the churches could not simply read what was written about an issue. Today we need no such consultations with living apostles because the original inspired men wrote the message in the Bible to provide us to all good works (2 Timothy 3:16,17). The church was continuing in “the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42).

15:30-35 - The Letter Delivered to Antioch

15:30,31 – The letter was delivered and read at Antioch.

Judas and Silas then accompanied Paul and Barnabas to Antioch, called the church together, and delivered the letter. This gave the brethren great joy and encouragement.

No doubt they rejoiced to know that unity had been achieved, that they had not been deceived by Paul and Barnabas, and their own service to God had been Scriptural. Just as important would be their joy in knowing they were free from the requirements of the law and did not need to return to its inferior system. The gospel was a universal system offering salvation to all on the same terms.

15:32-35 – The prophets continued for some time their work in Antioch.

Judas and Silas were themselves prophets so they not only confirmed the words of the letter but also gave additional words of strength and exhortation. Having accomplished their mission, they were dismissed to return peaceably to Jerusalem.

The KJV (and ASV footnote), however, says Silas determined to stay in Antioch. Whether or not this statement is in the original, it surely is true for it is revealed just a few verses later that he was still in Antioch.

Finally, we are told that Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch preaching and teaching the word.

Paul's Second Preaching Trip – 15:36-18:22

15:36-41 - Disagreement between Paul and Barnabas

15:36 – Paul and Barnabas discussed another preaching trip.

Some time later, Paul and Barnabas decided to make another preaching trip. Especially, they wanted to go to the areas where they had preached before and see how the brethren were faring.

Note that established churches need continued strength and encouragement to mature and remain faithful. It is not enough just to convert people and begin congregations. We need to follow up to strengthen them and bring them to maturity.

15:37,38 – They disagreed about whether or not to take Mark.

An unfortunate dispute arose between Paul and Barnabas. These men, who had labored so long together accomplishing such great things in so many places, were unable to agree about whether or not to take John Mark with them on this second journey.

Mark was a cousin to Barnabas (Colossians 4:10). Barnabas was determined to take Mark with them. Paul was equally determined not to take Mark because he had left them on the first preaching trip and had not fulfilled his responsibility in the work (13:13).

We are not told the reasons why Mark had left, but they were clearly unacceptable to Paul. On the other hand, either it had been simply a matter of judgment or else Mark had repented; otherwise Barnabas surely would never have agreed to take him. Paul himself later expressed confidence in Mark (2 Timothy 4:11), and Mark later wrote an account of Jesus' life.

15:39-41 – The disagreement led to contention so sharp that it finally resulted in the two men going separate ways.

Rather than continue in controversy, the two men decided to travel and preach separately. Barnabas took Mark and went to preach at Cyprus (his native land). Paul took Silas and passed through Syria and Cilicia strengthening the churches.

Note that Paul was commended by the brethren, clearly showing that they did not believe he did wrong. Nor is there any other evidence he was wrong. On the other hand, the fact Paul later viewed Mark as useful shows that Barnabas' confidence in Mark was not misplaced. And Paul later made favorable references to Barnabas as faithful (1 Corinthians 9:6).

This chapter of Acts can serve as major instruction about resolving problems in the church. Some problems definitely involve principles of right and wrong. They must be resolved on the basis of God's word with no compromise of any Bible truth. Those who will not accept what God's word teaches are in error and must be so identified. Such was the case regarding the issue about circumcision (15:1-35).

However, other issues are matters of personal judgment and do not necessarily violate any Bible principle one way or another. In such matters, we may have sharp disagreement, but we can compromise. We need not resolve it one particular way. We may even agree to disagree, go our separate ways, and still consider one another to be faithful to God and useful in His service. Such was the case with the dispute over Mark (verses 36-41). Not every issue is a matter of fellowship, nor must we splinter over every disagreement. Even if we decide to go our separate ways, that does not mean we must consider one another to be in sin.

And still another lesson is this: It is Scripturally right and valid to consider a man's past life when determining in what capacity he will be used by the church in special jobs such as preaching. Some people think that, no matter what a man has done in the past, if he has repented and says he is willing to do differently, his past failures must be totally overlooked and he must be allowed to serve in whatever capacity he chooses! We are even told that, if we allow his past errors to affect our decision whether or not to use him in some capacity, we have not forgiven him.

However, Paul evidently did not agree with the position just described. He believed a man's past conduct should be taken into consideration when we decide whether or not to use him in a certain capacity. Obviously, Mark was no longer in sin. That was not the issue. But the issue was whether or not to entrust him with responsibility that his past conduct implied he might not handle well. Paul believed it was valid to refuse to use such a man, yet nothing indicates Paul sinned or was unforgiving. Later, Paul wanted Mark with him, indicating that he had not intended to never use Mark but that he thought more *time* was needed for Mark to prove himself and mature before he was so used.

On the other hand, Barnabas wanted to use the man under the same circumstances, and nothing indicates he sinned or compromised the truth either. Some men simply are willing to use people more quickly after they have done wrong than other people are.

Suppose, for example, a man serving as treasurer steals money from the church treasury. He is caught and repents. Must we immediately put him in as treasurer again? Suppose a Bible class teacher molests a child in class. He is caught and repents. Must we immediately put him in the class again? No Scripture regarding forgiveness would require us to do so. Such actions would not only be foolish but would destroy the church's influence and tempt the person to further sin. He needs to be given time to mature, strengthen his resistance to temptation, and repair his reputation before being placed again in any such situation. When may he be reinstated? It is a matter of judgment. The point is that no Scripture requires us to immediately reinstate such people, and we may have differences of viewpoint, even strongly different. But we can resolve the matter as best we can without breaking fellowship.

The same principles all apply in such cases as a preacher who betrays the trust of the Lord and the church by committing serious sin such as adultery. Must we immediately put him in the pulpit again? No Scripture regarding forgiveness would require us to do so. Such actions would not only be foolish but would destroy the church's influence and tempt the person to further sin. He needs to be given time to mature, strengthen his resistance to temptation, and repair his reputation before being placed again in any such situation. When may he be reinstated? It is a matter of judgment. The point is that no Scripture requires us to immediately reinstate such people, and we may have differences of viewpoint, even strongly different. But we can resolve the matter as best we can without breaking fellowship.

Clearly, such decisions are matters of judgment in which the people involved simply must make a choice and not let it affect their fellowship. Yet some churches will get all torn up over such issues, divide, and think all kinds of hateful things of one another. Let us learn to have peace where we can have peace, even if we must go our separate ways to do so.

Acts 16

16:1-5 - Paul and Silas Joined by Timothy

16:1,2 – Paul found Timothy highly respected by the disciples. His mother was a Jewess, but his father was a Greek.

Since Paul and Barnabas had separated, Barnabas' work is no longer described in the account. Instead, the message follows Paul and Silas who travel through Syria (where Antioch was) and Cilicia, the region including Lystra and Derbe (compare 15:41; see *map*). Lystra was the city where Paul had been worshiped as a god and then stoned and left for dead (14:8-20). Yet he returned there.

There he found a disciple named Timothy whom he wanted to take with him on his travels. His mother was a Jewess who had been converted to the gospel of Jesus. She was a “believer” named Eunice, as was her mother Lois (compare 2 Timothy 1:5). However, his father was a Greek. Timothy himself had been converted and had an excellent reputation among Christians both in Lystra and Iconium.

Timothy was a young man but was concerned about being actively involved in God's work (1 Timothy 4:12). Young people today need the same attitude. Paul was concerned about developing the abilities of young men in preaching the gospel, so he was willing to give Timothy the opportunity to work with him. His objection to taking Mark was not a general objection to young men, but only to Mark because of his previous conduct. We should encourage young men to become experienced in preaching, and should give them opportunities for training. One good way to do this is to have them accompany older, more experienced preachers.

Paul called Timothy his “son in the faith” (1 Timothy 1:2), so it appears that Paul had converted or baptized Timothy, probably on his first journey. Since Timothy did accompany Paul, he is mentioned frequently in subsequent chapters as well as in Paul's letters. Paul later addressed two inspired letters specifically to Timothy.

16:3 – Paul had Timothy circumcised so he could work with Jews, since they knew his father was a Greek.

Paul had Timothy circumcised so that he could go with him. Why do this in light of the lengthy confrontation in chapter 15 showing circumcision was not necessary? In fact, Galatians 2 shows that, in the case of another young preacher named Titus, Paul had used him as a test case

insisting that he need not be circumcised. Why then circumcise Timothy?

The explanation given is that the Jews in that region knew that his father was a Greek. Circumcision is just a physical act which, of itself, means nothing either way regarding salvation (1 Corinthians 7:19; Galatians 5:6). Circumcision was not essential to salvation or to please God, but it was not wrong to be circumcised. The problem in Acts 15 was that some were binding circumcision as being a religious act necessary to salvation. Paul resisted that doctrine.

However, when not done as an act of faith necessary to please God, circumcision is fine, whether done for health purposes or as a national tradition. It was not wrong then or now for one to engage in an act to identify his national heritage, provided it is not done as a matter of religious requirement. The issue then became a matter of influence (as the eating of meat in 1 Corinthians 8,10). Specifically, Paul had said that, in order to have opportunity to teach and save people, he would become a Jew to Jews or a Gentile to Gentiles (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). He conformed to the customs of those he worked among, not as something that was spiritually required, but to obtain opportunities to teach.

Specifically, Jews would not associate with uncircumcised Gentiles (Acts 10:28). Since Timothy's father was known to be a Greek, many Jews would doubt that Timothy was acceptable for them to associate with and he would lose many teaching opportunities. By having Timothy circumcised, Paul removed this hindrance for the sake of teaching unconverted Jews. However, he had resisted firmly Jewish Christians who insisted circumcision was essential to salvation.

16:4,5 – They delivered to churches the decision of the apostles and elders at Jerusalem.

In this first part of the trip, Paul was traveling to cities where he and Barnabas had previously taught and established churches. He was there to strengthen the disciples as well as to convert more people (compare 15:36; 14:22).

As they did so, they also delivered the decrees determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem (see notes on 15:1-35). Remember, these are not “decrees” in the sense that mere men have the right to form conferences and make rulings that other Christians must obey. This decision was reached by inspired men, especially apostles, by the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit. The elders were involved because the men who had taught error had come from the church these elders were responsible for (and perhaps because they were also inspired).

16:6-40 - Preaching at Philippi

16:6-10 – The call to preach in Macedonia

16:6-8 – The Holy Spirit forbade them to preach in Asia or Bithynia, so they traveled to Troas.

The preachers passed through the regions of Phrygia (west-central Asia Minor) and Galatia (central Asia Minor). The language here does not say whether they preached in these regions, but it is probable that they did. This may have been the beginning of the churches of Galatia to whom Paul later wrote the book of Galatians.

However, the Holy Spirit forbade them to preach in Asia (not the modern continent we call Asia, but the region of western Asia Minor that then wore that name). After they had passed Mysia, the Spirit forbade them to preach in Bithynia (a region north of Galatia). So they continued till they came to Troas on the seacoast (see *map*).

Nothing here means God did not care for the souls of these people. But He had other purposes for Paul elsewhere. In fact, churches were established here, for John later wrote to the churches of Asia in the book of Revelation.

16:9,10 – Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia urging them to come to Macedonia and help them.

When they arrived at Troas, an event occurred which explained why the Spirit did not want them to preach in Asia. Paul had a vision showing them where the Spirit did want them to preach. A man of Macedonia appeared and pleaded with Paul to come to Macedonia and help them. They concluded that the Lord had called them to preach in Macedonia, so they began making arrangements to go there. (Note that we need not speculate how Paul knew the man was a Macedonian. He said, “Come over to *Macedonia* and help us.”)

Note that, as with Peter’s vision in Acts 10, this involved a necessary inference. The Lord never directly told them to go preach in Macedonia. But the vision of a “man” calling for “help,” combined with the fact they were told by the Spirit not to preach in the areas they had just passed through, led them to the conclusion that the “help” the Macedonians needed was the gospel and that it was the Lord who really was making the request.

Also note that a vision is revelation in the form of an event seen by the inspired man, though the event was not physically occurring (see Acts 10:9-17).

And further in verse 10 is the first occurrence of the terms “we” and “us” in the record. This implies that the man actually writing the account (Luke) had not been present previously but had joined the group here in Troas. (We are not told why or how.)

16:11-15 – The conversion of Lydia in Philippi

16:11,12 – Paul and his group sailed to Philippi.

The group sailed from Troas to Samothrace, an island in the Aegean Sea (see **map**). The next day they arrived at Neapolis, which was the seaport of Philippi. They went from there to Philippi, the foremost city of that area of Macedonia and a Roman colony (see **map**). A Roman colony had certain advantages in independence and taxes. Paul's company stayed there awhile.

It is helpful to observe Paul's pattern in preaching in new regions. He always went first to major cities to establish the first churches in a region. Then the gospel could spread from there to outlying areas. He did not go to the small towns or villages first. This had several advantages that we need to imitate today. In large towns are more people and therefore more likelihood of finding good contacts. And people in outlying areas are more likely to go into the large cities for purposes of business or entertainment, and may contact the truth if a church exists there. But people in large cities are less likely to be influenced by events in outlying areas. Other factors may have been involved, but it is a pattern well worth considering.

Stringer discusses at some length the sense in which Philippi could be described as the "foremost" city in that part of Macedonia, since it was apparently neither the capital city nor the largest city. Since Luke says this is true only of that "part" of Macedonia, and since he does not define the sense in which he meant "foremost," I see little reason for concern about the subject.

16:13,14 – On the Sabbath that they preached to women at the riverside. They met Lydia whose heart the Lord opened.

Paul's pattern in preaching in new cities had been to go first to the Jewish synagogue; however there apparently was none in Philippi. Nevertheless, they were able to find a group of women (Jews and/or God fearers) who met by a riverside on the Sabbath for prayer. They went there and taught the women who came.

One of the women named Lydia was a worshiper of God (we are not told directly that she was a Jew – Cornelius, for example, had been a Gentile who worshiped God). She was a seller of purple (either purple dye or clothing dyed purple), originally from Thyatira, but at this time living in Philippi.

God opened Lydia's heart as Paul spoke. Note that it is God that opens people's hearts to the truth; but it is done through the word, not by some direct action of the Holy Spirit apart from the word (Romans 1:16; 10:17; Ephesians 6:17). Note that her heart was opened (verse 14) **after** she heard the word spoken by Paul (verse 13). The only influence described in the context which could explain how Lydia's heart was opened is that she heard the word. To attribute the opening of her heart

to some unnamed power apart from the word is to speak where the passage does not speak and to add an idea that is nowhere stated in this passage or any other. So, the meaning of the passage is clear: the Lord opened Lydia's heart by means of the power of the message of the gospel which she heard. This conclusion fits the other examples of conversion we have studied.

Nothing here contradicts the Bible doctrine of free moral agency. Each person determines for himself what his response will be to the truth, but it is the power of God in the gospel that reaches the hearts of those who are willing to be receptive. God will not force people's hearts to open, contrary to their will, nor does He determine what their will is (as Calvinism teaches). Salvation is conditional, not unconditional. But the gospel is so designed that its power appeals to people who have the kinds of hearts God is looking for (see notes on Acts 14:46,48).

16:15 – Lydia and her household were baptized, then requested Paul's company to stay in her home.

The result of the teaching was that Lydia and her household were baptized. Then she urged these preachers to stay at her house while they preached in the area. This is an excellent example of hospitality and concern for the spread of the gospel. It demonstrates the good works Christian women can do.

Summarizing this example of conversion (see **chart**), we learn that Lydia heard the word (verses 13,14), and was baptized (verse 15).

Note some things that are **not** stated in Lydia's case, despite the fact that some people mistakenly claim them to be true:

(1) We do not know she was married. It is actually unlikely that she was. No husband is ever mentioned. Only "women" were mentioned as being at the place of worship. If she had a husband, he must have been converted when her household was converted; but husbands are usually mentioned if they are included in "household" conversions. Specifically, the husband, if there is one, is the head of the "household." In such cases, the Scriptures refer to the household as the man's household, not the wife's household as is done here.

Further, Lydia appears to use her house quite independently of any man's authority, which a Christian wife should not do. Her "household" would include all who lived in the house, which might include servants, relatives, and perhaps even workers in her business, etc. As McGarvey stated, "...it is probable that she was an unmarried woman..."

(2) We do not know she had children in her household. None are mentioned.

(3) If she did have children, we do not know they were small children still living at home. It is entirely possible, for example, that her husband was dead and her children grown (if she ever had any).

(4) We do not know that her work took her away from home long hours like man's work often did. Clothing, for example, could be made

at home, as the worthy woman of Proverbs 31 did. It could even be sold from the home or delivered to stores elsewhere to be sold. Her home was apparently quite spacious (she freely offered to take in four more men). Further, it appears that she controlled the business, in which case she could set her own hours and time. Nothing stated here would require that Lydia be away from her family (if she had any) for long hours on a regular basis, working at someone else's schedule.

The bottom line is that it is impossible to prove, as some people try to do, that this "household" included babies that were baptized. And it is equally impossible, for much the same reasons, to prove that this is an example of a wife and mother, having an able-bodied husband, who left her family for long hours each week expecting others to raise her children while she pursued another career, like mothers today often do (compare Titus 2:4,5; 1 Timothy 5:14). Neither of these practices can be proved by Lydia's case, and the reasoning regarding both practices in her case is parallel. The only way to determine the validity of either of these practices would be to use other passages elsewhere, and I am unaware of any passages that provide such evidence.

16:16-24 – Paul and Silas Imprisoned

16:16 – They met a girl with a spirit of divination, who brought much profit to her masters by fortune telling.

After the conversion of Lydia, Paul and company continued preaching at Philippi. On one occasion, while they were going to the place of prayer, they met a young woman who had a spirit of divination and produced profit for her masters by fortune telling.

Divination refers to attempts to foretell the future by occult powers such as evil spirits, demons, communicating with the dead, heathen deities, etc. – any power other than prophesying by the true power of God. In this case, the power was given by a demon or unclean spirit (verse 18).

We are not told how much power the spirit really gave her, though it was enough that it made a good income for her masters. The important point is that the power of the spirit was clearly inferior to that of the Holy Spirit working in the inspired men, as proved by the fact that the spirit could not prevent itself from being cast out of the girl. In particular, there is no evidence that any occult power can predict the future with consistent accuracy (compare Deuteronomy 18:20-22).

This is similar to the cases in which the power working in Philip and Paul was clearly superior to that working in Simon and Elymas the sorcerers (Acts 8,10). Note that all references to occult powers in the Bible, Old or New Testaments, also show them to be evil and to be inferior to the true miracles of God.

16:17,18 – Paul cast the evil spirit out of the girl.

This maiden, having met Paul and Silas, followed them around for many days broadcasting that they were servants of God preaching the

way of salvation. It is clear that this evil spirit, like those in Jesus' day, was able to recognize the true power of God (James 2:19; Mark 5:7). Why it stated this so openly, however, is not clear. Perhaps it was a form of mockery. In any case, it clearly distressed Paul and perhaps that is what the demon wanted to accomplish.

Paul became annoyed to the point he commanded the spirit to come out of her in the name of Jesus Christ. It obeyed and came out the same hour. Again, the evidence of true miracles is clear. There was no doubt that the spirit truly was gone, for the girl's masters could no longer use her profitably (verse 19). The result occurred immediately and was clearly impossible by natural means, since no natural power could produce such a result by simply telling the problem to go away. The result not only defeated the evil intent of the demon but also provided great evidence for the truth and superior power of the gospel.

It is interesting that Paul, like Jesus, did not want testimony from evil spirits even if it was true testimony. When evil people bear testimony to the truth, it tends to make people associate the gospel with the sins of those evil people. People may even conclude God's people condone the sin. It would be like a soap company accepting advertising from Pigpen from the Peanuts cartoons: a little boy who never used the soap and was always filthy! If he is still filthy, how can he effectively promote soap? So a girl with a demon was not effective evidence for the truth. Paul proved the real power of the word of God and cast the demon out.

16:19-21 – The girl's masters took Paul and Silas before the authorities and accused them of teaching unlawful customs.

No doubt Paul did a good work both for the benefit of the woman and especially to prove that his power really was from God. However, the act displeased the men who had been making money off her skills. They realized they could no longer make money from her; so in vengeance, they captured Paul and Silas and dragged them to the authorities in the marketplace. This marketplace has been, in more recent times, excavated by archaeologists.

There the men accused them, as Jews, of troubling the city, teaching customs which Romans could not follow. Obviously, they were more interested in money than in the well-being of the girl. As we have observed in many cases, they hardened their hearts to the clear evidence before them that Paul and Silas were messengers having true power from God.

The charges are vague and unfounded. In effect, they simply accused the teachers without specifying what law they had violated! Perhaps they thought the fact they were Jews would raise sufficient prejudice against them to accomplish their purpose.

Note that the accusation these men made had nothing whatever to do with what was really bothering them. They accused Paul and Silas of having broken Roman law, when they were not in the least concerned about any such alleged violations. What really bothered them was the

loss of income. Love of money is a powerful motive leading to many kinds of evil (1 Timothy 6:9,10), but those who are guilty rarely admit that is their real motive. Likewise, today many people make accusations against Christians that are unrelated to their real concern. Often the thing they really have against us is something that no one else would care about, so they have to drum up some imaginary issue that they hope will bother other people.

Note also that here, for perhaps the first time recorded, Gentiles persecuted Paul using against him the fact he was a Jew. Almost invariably previous persecutions had involved Jews persecuting Paul. This probably resulted from the fact there were so few Jewish men in the city, else they would likely have already started a persecution as they did elsewhere.

16:22-24 – Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned.

The multitude reacted by also speaking against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates in anger commanded them to be beaten with rods (compare 2 Corinthians 11:25). This was nothing less than religious persecution, perhaps because people hated Jews. No other reason is given. It was illegal, as we will see later in the account, because the men were also Roman citizens.

Many stripes were put on the men and they were then thrown in prison. The jailer was commanded to keep them securely, so he put them in the inner prison and put their feet in stocks. In such a situation, they could never have escaped by any natural means. How sad and upsetting that men can act so foolishly with no evidence. We cannot appreciate the situation unless we try to put ourselves in the position of the preachers.

16:25-34 – Conversion of the jailer

16:25,26 – As Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, a great earthquake set the prisoners free.

Despite the mistreatment, Paul and Silas were not angry with God nor had they lost their faith. They knew such things were to be expected, so they continued trusting God and even used the situation as an opportunity to influence others for good. At midnight, they were singing praises to God and the other prisoners were listening. We are not told why they chose such a time to sing and pray.

They had been unjustly accused and beaten. No doubt, they were still in much pain, perhaps even bleeding. They had been imprisoned and placed in stocks – a most uncomfortable position. Yet they praised God and worshiped! Would we have the faith and courage to openly praise God under such circumstances?

God responded by suddenly sending a great earthquake. But it was not just any earthquake. It was highly selective! It shook the prison, opened the doors, and removed the chains holding the prisoners! Obviously, the people could have left, but incredibly no one did. We are not

told why the other prisoners did not leave. Perhaps it was the shock of the situation or just that everything happened so quickly they didn't have time to think to leave. Or again, perhaps it was simply the power of God using the situation for the jailer's conversion.

16:27,28 – The jailer was about to kill himself but Paul prevented him.

The jailer had been asleep (which perhaps he should not have), but he awoke to see all the jail doors open! He assumed this meant the prisoners had fled, and losing one's prisoners (especially while sleeping) meant execution in the Roman Empire (compare Acts 12:19).

Rather than wait to be executed, the jailer took his own sword and was about to kill himself. Paul, however, stopped him by telling him the prisoners were all still there, so he should not hurt himself.

Notice that Paul urged the man not to take his life. Suicide is never condoned in Scripture but always discouraged. While the Bible records several instances of suicide, every case was of someone who was not a faithful servant of God. No one who serves God faithfully has reason to end his own life. Instead, no matter how difficult circumstances might be, like Job, we must trust our care into the hands of Him who cares for us (1 Peter 5:7; Philippians 4:6-8; 1 Corinthians 10:13).

16:29,30 – The jailer asked Paul and Silas what to do to be saved.

The jailer was so affected by these events that he realized Paul and Silas were no ordinary men. He called for a light and came trembling to fall before the preachers, brought them out, and asked them what he should do to be saved.

This leads us to wonder what the man had already known of Paul and Silas and their teaching. He evidently knew enough that he realized he was a sinful man and they were offering salvation. No doubt he knew they were preachers of some religious belief and knew why they were imprisoned. He had probably heard their hymns and understood some of their content, as the prisoners had. It is possible that he had either heard their teaching in the past or at least heard of them.

In any case the earthquake, combined with the fact the men did not leave but saved his life, was enough to convince him that they were unusual men. And if they were religious teachers then he wanted to know what they were teaching.

The question he asked is no doubt one of the most important any man can ever ask (compare Acts 2:37; 22:10). Every person on the face of the earth should be interested in the question and especially in the answer. Yet sadly many people do not care, and perhaps worse yet, many have the wrong answer.

16:31 – The preachers told the jailer to believe on Jesus.

Paul and Silas answered simply that he needed to believe on Jesus and he would be saved, he and his household. This is surely the same message that needs to be heard by everyone one on earth who, like the jailer, does not believe in Jesus. Faith in Jesus is absolutely essential to salvation, and those who do not have it cannot be saved (Hebrews 10:39; 11:1,4-8,17,30; Romans 1:16; 4:19-21; 5:1,2; 10:9,10,13-17; Galatians 5:6; 2 Corinthians 5:7; James 2:14-26; John 1:12; 3:15-18; 8:24; 20:30,31; Mark 16:15,16).

Yet amazingly, the overwhelming majority of Protestant preachers will quote verse 31 (or its equivalent), stop there, and tell people that is all they need to be saved. They even claim that people are in error if they go further and tell people they must obey Jesus and be baptized to be saved. Yet, the Scriptures themselves do go further and show there is more to the story. And this is only one of many passages about salvation. We must take all the Bible says (Acts 3:22:23). If we study further we learn:

(1) Other passages do teach that obedience is essential (Matthew 7:21-27; 22:36-39; John 14:15,21-24; Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:6-10; 6:17,18; Hebrews 5:9; 10:39; 11:8,30; Galatians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9; James 2:14-26; 1 Peter 1:22,23; 1 John 5:3; 2:3-6). Saving faith is always obedient faith. Note in particular that James 2:24 (and other passages) teach that faith alone will not save.

(2) The obedience necessary to salvation does include baptism. Baptism does not earn salvation any more than faith does, but both faith and baptism are essential to receive God's forgiveness (Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21).

(3) The context of this very passage shows the importance of baptism, for it shows that Paul and Silas had not yet told the jailer the whole story. They had only just begun! In verse 32 they spoke the word of the Lord to him and his household; as a result he was baptized (verse 34)!

(4) The urgency of baptism is emphasized in this story by the fact that the jailer's household saw the need to be baptized that very night, despite the fact it was the middle of the night when the teaching began. Why the urgency if, as people teach, all that is necessary is faith without baptism? Would those who believe in salvation by faith alone have baptized these people in the middle of the night? And note that the jailer's household is not said to have truly believed till after they were baptized. As McGarvey said, "Those who argue that the jailer obtained pardon by faith alone, leave the jail too soon."

The reason Paul and Silas emphasized faith at the beginning of their teaching is simply that this is where the jailer needed to begin in order to be saved. People who do not believe must be told the importance of faith. But nothing here or elsewhere says that is all that is needed to be saved. In fact, saving faith always includes and requires obedience; it

does not exclude it. There is not a single example anywhere, after the gospel began to be preached on Pentecost, in which a person was saved before baptism or without baptism. In fact, a person who does not believe baptism is necessary is a person who does not even have a proper faith in Jesus! To believe in Jesus, one must believe what He taught, and He clearly taught baptism was a necessary part of the gospel (Mark 16:16).

16:32,33 – The preachers then told the rest of the story, so the jailer’s family was baptized the same hour of the night.

Paul and Silas were then taken to the jailer’s house where they spoke the word of the Lord to all there. Verse 31 was not the whole story, but just the introduction! The sinners needed “the rest of the story.” Imagine a man today who hears just the introduction of a sermon about salvation, concludes that is all he needs to hear, does what the introduction said, ignores the rest, and claims he is saved and anybody who says otherwise is wrong! That is like preachers who misuse this event.

Faithful preachers will begin teaching people at the point of their need. People who do not believe in Jesus need first to be told to believe in Him, so that is where these preachers begin. But that does not mean there is nothing more to be told. If you tell someone who does not believe in God that, in order to be saved, he must believe in God, would that mean there is nothing more to it? What about believing in Jesus and in the Bible? The teachers started at the beginning. Then they told the rest of what is required. That is exactly what Paul and Silas did, with the result the man and his family were baptized (verse 33).

Further, he took them “the same hour of the night,” washed their stripes (indicating repentance) and was baptized. Preachers who use this event to try to prove baptism is not essential need to explain why the urgency! It was midnight when this all began, yet the man was baptized the same hour of the night after he learned the truth. Why? Denominational preachers tell people they are saved when they believe and can be baptized weeks or months later at a “baptismal service.” They believe the man is saved in the meantime, so why rush? Until denominational preachers come to believe that baptism is so urgent that it must be done even in the middle of the night – and until they can explain why it needs to be done, even in the middle of the night – they cannot claim to teach the truth from this passage.

But neither the jailer nor the inspired men believed like such modern preachers do. They went to the extreme inconvenience of baptizing these people at this strange hour of the morning, even though Paul and Silas were doubtless still in pain from the beatings. Why not wait?

There can be only one sensible answer, and it is the one we have given. The people were still in their sins until they were baptized because baptism is necessary to receive forgiveness. That is why all examples in

Acts show people being told not to wait but to be baptized immediately when they believe and repent (see 2:41; 22:16; 16:33; 8:35-39; etc.).

16:34 – The group then returned to the house rejoicing.

Some claim that these baptisms could not have been by immersion, since there would not have been sufficient water in the jail or the house to immerse people. This is a completely unfounded assertion. Did people then never take baths? Why could they not have had tubs sufficient to immerse people in?

But we do not need to speculate about that issue, for the fact is that the baptism did not occur in the house or in the jail. The passage says that the preachers spoke the message to all who were in the jailer's house (verse 32). So, they left the jail and went to teach his family, wherever they were, presumably in the house where they lived. Then, the jailer "took" the preachers – implying they went somewhere else. Then they were baptized and, after the baptism, they returned to the house, for he "brought them into his house."

So the necessary inferences are as follows: The jailer's family lived in a "house," as verse 34 clearly states. The preachers and the jailer went to the "house," where his family lived, to teach them. Then they left the "house" to perform the baptism, then they returned to the house after the baptism. So, they were not baptized in the house or in the jail. They left the house to perform the baptism and then returned to the house. Why would this be necessary if the baptism consisted of sprinkling or pouring water on them? So, the truth is that the context does not fit sprinkling or pouring. It makes sense only if the baptism was done by immersion, as is confirmed by Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12; Hebrews 10:22; etc.

Note also that the rejoicing came after the baptism, not before. Denominational preachers have people rejoicing before baptism, because they believe they are saved before baptism. But not so in Bible examples. Further, people do not have true saving faith till after baptism, because saving faith is obedient faith. So, as we have learned, they are said to believe only after they are baptized.

Finally, some people say the baptism of the jailer's household proves infant baptism. But what proof is there that any infants were in this household (compare on Lydia in 16:15). Those who were baptized first believed (verse 31) and heard the word (verse 32). After baptism, they rejoiced (verse 34). Infants do none of these. No infants here.

So, people claim this passage teaches salvation by faith only before baptism, others claim it proves infant baptism, and still others claim it proves baptism by sprinkling or pouring. But the truth is that the passage, carefully studied, not only does not prove any of those false beliefs, but in fact it contradicts them all.

Summary of this example (see **chart**): The jailer heard (verses 31,32), believed (verses 31,34), and was baptized (verse 33).

For further discussion of baptism, its importance and who should be baptized, see our articles on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

16:35-40 – Paul and Silas freed

16:35,36 – The next day rulers sent to free Paul and Silas.

The next day the magistrates send word to free Paul and Silas. Apparently, they considered the matter further and decided the beating and night's imprisonment was sufficient.

The jailer passed the word to Paul and Silas and asked them to go in peace.

16:37 – Paul objected to a private resolution after they had been beaten publicly and illegally.

But Paul was not satisfied to let the matter drop so easily. He and Silas, though Jews, were also Roman citizens. It was illegal to beat a Roman citizen who had not first been given a fair trial and convicted according to law (authorities could beat unconvicted people of other nationalities, but not Romans). Perhaps being told the men were Jews, the magistrates just assumed they were not Roman citizens.

Paul explained that they had been beaten openly or publicly and then imprisoned. This was illegal. Now for the rulers to secretly release them would be inadequate. The rulers needed to personally come and release them.

Paul's motives are not directly stated, but he may have had several motives. Perhaps he wanted to teach the magistrates a lesson. Perhaps he wanted to provide protection for the other Christians, since the rulers would think twice before doing this again. Perhaps, more likely, he wanted the cause of the Lord to be exonerated in the eyes of the people. The preachers had been publicly shamed. Now the magistrates should publicly admit their error. The effect would be to bring respect to the faith, whereas it had been shamed.

We can learn that we should be concerned about the appearances we leave, to the extent possible. Furthermore, Christians have the right to use the law for our own protection and justice when possible. We need not submit to mistreatment, if there is a legitimate solution, especially when otherwise God's cause may be given a bad reputation.

16:38,39 – The rulers then came, released them, and urged them to leave the city.

When the magistrates realized these men were Romans, they were the ones who were afraid! They had violated Roman law and could be severely punished by Roman authorities had Paul and Silas chosen to pursue the matter. They came humbly, brought the men out pleading with them, and asked them to leave the area.

It is to be hoped that the result would be better treatment of the Christians in the future. These rulers would not be quick to persecute Christians further knowing Paul and Silas could at any time bring this up to the higher authorities.

16:40 – The preachers left the city after greeting the Christians.

Paul and Barnabas left the prison, went to Lydia's house, and met with the brethren to encourage them. Then they left the city as requested. No doubt, the Christians were deeply concerned about the well being of Paul and Silas. What is more, they would be concerned about any future persecution that might come on other members. The circumstances under which the preachers left the prison, while it still led them to leave town, nevertheless left the brethren much less discouraged.

Note again how persecution had led Paul to leave another town. Further, it says "they" left, implying Luke stayed in Philippi, presumably to help the new converts.

Acts 17

17:1-9 - Preaching in Thessalonica

17:1 – They traveled from Philippi to Thessalonica.

Having left Philippi, Paul and his company traveled by way of Amphipolis and Apollonia to Thessalonica – modern day Salonika (see **map**). “They” indicates that Luke had stayed behind in Philippi, probably to strengthen the disciples. Philippians 4:16 explains that, while Paul preached in Thessalonica, he received some support from the church in Philippi. However, he also labored with his hands to provide for his needs – 1 Thessalonians 2:9.

17:2 – Paul taught in the synagogue for three Sabbaths by reasoning from Scripture.

Unlike Philippi, Thessalonica had a Jewish synagogue. So Paul went there three consecutive Sabbaths to preach to them. Note again that Paul was not in the synagogue because he believed the Sabbath to be binding. This was not a meeting of Christians but of Jews who did not believe in Jesus. Paul attended, not to participate in their Sabbath observance as a matter of religious activity, but to teach and convert them from their errors. He had already participated in the Jerusalem meeting where he had taught that the Old Law was no longer binding (Acts 15), and he had taught this in many of his epistles: see Hebrews 10:1-10; 7:11-14; 8:6-13; 9:1-4; 2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Galatians 3:24,25; 5:1-6; Romans 7:1-7; Ephesians 2:11-16; Colossians 2:13-17. See further notes on Acts 13:14 and such passages.

We can learn from this, however, that it is legitimate for Christians to attend meetings of people who are in error, provided the intent is, not to participate in the error, but to seek opportunities to teach the people so they can leave their error. In fact, it was Paul’s custom to do this.

The method Paul used to try to convert these people was to **reason** with them from the **Scriptures**. He did not instruct them to pray to receive a direct revelation to tell them what to do to be saved or to confirm the truth of what he taught. He did not try to sway them by human wisdom, by appeals to carnal attractions, or even by emotional appeals. He presented evidence from God’s word and reasoned from it to conclusions regarding the changes they needed to make (compare 1 Peter 3:15). He believed in religious discussions with people with whom he disagreed; in fact, this was his customary practice. He appealed to the word of God as the standard of authority.

17:3 – He reasoned to convince the people that Jesus is the Christ who had to suffer and be crucified.

Paul “explained and demonstrated” or “opened and alleged” (ASV) or “explained and gave evidence” (NASB) or “explained and proved” (NIV). He stated his proposition and presented evidence to prove it. Compare 1 Thessalonians 1:5.

This is one of many Scriptures that shows we are expected to reason with people in teaching them. We should not expect people to accept Jesus by “blind faith” without proof. Furthermore, some truths are taught in Scripture but require reasoning on our part to understand and apply them. In particular, to know Jesus is the Christ from the Old Testament, one must draw “necessary inferences.” There are surely no direct statements in the Old Testament that prove Jesus is the Christ without drawing conclusions. So, this passage is another of many that demonstrate that it is valid, when teaching God’s word, to reason to conclusions that necessarily follow from Scripture and to expect others to accept the same conclusions.

Paul’s proposition was that Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead, and that Jesus is the Christ. This is the same point at which we need to begin our teaching for all who do not yet accept it.

Jews knew from the Old Testament that the Messiah was coming. What they did not understand (just like Jesus’ own disciples had not understood during His lifetime) was that His purpose here required Him to die and be raised. Yet, these facts had been predicted in the Old Testament.

Not only did the Jews not understand that their Messiah must die and be raised, they also did not believe that Jesus is the Messiah, just as Jews today do not so believe. How do we reason with such people? We should do as Paul did here, as Jesus Himself did after His resurrection (Luke 24:25-27,44-46), as Peter did on Pentecost (Acts 2), and Stephen did during his trial (Acts 7), etc. We should cite the Scriptures that Jews know to be from God, then we should explain how those passages necessarily lead honest people to conclude that Christ had to die and be raised from the dead. We then should show how these prophecies were fulfilled and confirmed by Jesus’ miracles and resurrection, as many eye-witnesses (including Paul) have testified.

Note again that the Bible clearly affirms that the Old Testament predicted that Jesus had to die and be raised (see notes on Acts 2,3,7,13, etc.). Jews did not understand this, and premillennialists still don’t understand it.

17:4 – Some Jews and many Greeks were converted.

As in most other places, Paul’s preaching produced some “visible results.” Some people were persuaded and took a stand with Paul and Silas. This included many devout Greeks (these were probably people

like Cornelius who were Gentiles but sympathized with the Jewish religion) and also not a few influential women. Paul later reminded the Thessalonians that many of them had turned from idolatry (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

Note how the Scriptures again demonstrate that faith in Jesus comes by hearing God's word (Romans 10:17). Therefore, we must preach and teach it, even as Paul did here, rather than appealing to gimmicks, social programs, or fun and games.

17:5 – Envious Jews formed a mob and sought to capture the preachers.

But again, as in most other places, Paul's preaching stirred up opposition from the Jews because of envy. They found some evil men from the marketplace to do their dirty work. They formed a mob, started an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, hoping to bring Paul and Silas out to the people.

Jason had received Paul and Silas (verse 7). Presumably, they were living at this man's house. Compare Romans 16:21, though that could refer to a different Jason.

Isn't it amazing how self-righteous people may refuse to associate with sinful men and may even criticize people like Jesus who associate with sinners to try to convert them. But when it serves their purpose, they will use evil, corrupt people to further their purpose of opposing the gospel, all in the name of righteousness!

And note the motivation of these Jews: the passage says they were motivated by envy. They did not act from a sincere conviction about truth or about men's relationship with God. Like the Jews who killed Jesus, they were simply jealous that Paul was making so many converts!

17:6 – They captured some brethren and accused them before the rulers of turning the world upside down.

When these Jews could not find Paul and Silas, they took Jason himself and other converts before the city rulers. They first accused Jason and the brethren of supporting men who had "turned the world upside down." This was intended to imply that the Christians were troublemakers. But who had caused this riot? Who had gathered a mob? Who had stirred up evil, base men? Paul had done none of these things. In reality, it was always the Jews, never Paul or the Christians, who started the riots.

In a sense, Paul had stirred up the world by his preaching, and this was neither an insult nor a crime. The change that the gospel produces is moral and spiritual, not violent. The lives of individuals were dramatically changed then and will be so today when people accept the truth as people did then. Can the same statement be made of our efforts to teach the world? Have we turned the world upside down?

Luke's reference here to "politarchs" is unique, not found in other ancient writings. It has been criticized as an error, but archeologists have recently confirmed Luke's accuracy (see Stringer and Coffman).

17:7 – The second charge was that they disobeyed Caesar to follow another king.

The Jews also raised another charge, which was the same charge that had been raised against Jesus before Pilate: that Jesus was another king, contrary to the decrees of Caesar.

This hypocrisy is incredible. In the first place, these Jews did not care a fig about Roman law. They would have dearly loved to see it overthrown, but they would profess great devotion to it if it served their purpose. This was all pretense; remember that their real concern was they were envious of the following Paul was getting (verse 5).

In particular, they would have been ecstatic if a Jew had successfully become king and revolted against Roman authority. They made this accusation because it was what they themselves believed and hoped the Messiah would someday do. But not believing Jesus was the Messiah, they falsely accused Him of plotting against the law.

In reality, however, neither Paul nor Jesus nor any Christian viewed Jesus as a rival of Caesar. He had taught people to render to Caesar what was his (Matthew 22), and Paul himself taught people to obey the law of the land (Romans 13:1ff). He never took up arms or caused a riot against anyone, let alone against civil law. Jesus ruled in a different realm from Caesar (John 18:36; Colossians 1:13,14).

Note, however, that it is true that Paul preached spiritually Jesus **is** a king, not that He would **become** king. This contradicts premillennialism.

17:8,9 – Much trouble resulted in the city, so the rulers took security from Jason and the others, then released them.

These accusations upset the people and the rulers. Note again who it was that caused the disruption. It was not the Christians but the Jews. Nevertheless, the rulers released Jason and the others after making them post bond or a pledge.

17:10-15 - Preaching in Berea

17:10 – Paul and Silas fled to Berea.

Fearing for the lives of Paul and Silas, the brethren sent them away by night to Berea, modern Verria (see **map**). Again, as usual, they immediately went to the Jewish synagogue to teach (see notes on verse 2).

Note that, no matter how much persecution and opposition they faced, Paul and faithful Christians always continued to proclaim the truth. They may have been compelled to flee or take other precautions to protect their lives, but they did not stop preaching the word. Let us learn the lesson.

17:11 – The Bereans received the message with readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures to learn the truth.

The attitude of the Bereans was much better than that of the Thessalonians. They had ready minds to receive the truth and they searched diligently in the Scriptures to see if they were being taught the truth. Several lessons follow:

(1) A good attitude is essential in order to receive truth. These people really wanted to know what was right. They were willing to work to find what was right, and they were willing to accept it when they found it.

They were not gullible, willing to accept whatever was said. They wanted proof. But they were willing to investigate with an open mind and then change when proved to be wrong. This is what Jesus described as a “good and honest heart” (Luke 18:15). Those who do not have such a love for the truth will believe a lie and be condemned (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). This attitude of honest investigation is essential for anyone to be saved.

(2) They were willing to study hard to learn the truth and to distinguish truth from error. They studied daily. Until people are motivated to put forth real effort, they will not be saved. Many Scriptures emphasize the need for regular, personal Bible study: John 8:32; Joshua 1:8; Hosea 4:6; Hebrews 5:12; Deuteronomy 6:6-9; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Timothy 2:15; Proverbs 2:1-20; Psalms 1:2; 119:47,48,97-99; 19:7-11; Matthew 5:6.

(3) They recognized the proper source of authority. They did not take the preachers’ word for it but checked in the Scriptures for themselves. We must do the same. Preachers of God’s word must appeal to the authority of the Scriptures as Paul did (verses 2,3). Listeners must check out the teachers by the Scriptures. Note that, if the Bereans were noble for checking out an apostle in the Scriptures, then surely Catholics and others will be noble if they study the Scriptures to check out those who claim to be successors of the apostles. Instead, many simply accept the teachings of their church leaders or hierarchy without question.

17:12 – Proper examination of Scripture led to faith.

The result of the Bereans’ good attitudes and diligent work was that many of them believed. Faith comes by hearing the word (Romans 10:17; John 20:30,31; 17:20). This is exactly what happened to the Bereans. Many Greeks and prominent women were included in the converts, as had been true in Thessalonica (verse 4).

17:13-15 – Persecutors came from Thessalonica, so Paul was sent on to Athens.

The Jews in Thessalonica were not satisfied to have driven Paul from their own city. As Paul before his conversion had persecuted people to other cities, so these Jews followed him to Berea and stirred up opposition.

To avoid the danger, the brethren again sent Paul away to the sea. (KJV says, “as it were to the sea.” Coffman concludes that at first they themselves were not sure what was the best course to take.)

To be sure Paul was safe from trouble, those who traveled with him took him all the way to Athens (see *map*). The brethren returned with instructions that Silas and Timothy, who had remained in Berea, should speedily go to Paul in Athens.

17:16-34 - Preaching in Athens

17:16 – The idolatry of Athens deeply troubled Paul.

At this point Paul was alone in Athens waiting for Silas and Timothy. This was unusual for him, since he almost always had other teachers traveling and working with him – a wise practice that we would do well to imitate.

Yet he did not wait for the others before he began preaching. He was so upset by the idolatry of the city that he had to speak out. Note that we too need to be stirred to speak out against evil when it confronts us. Sin should lead us to have courage like Paul had.

The city was given over to idols. It was the ancient center of Greek culture (verse 24), but this culture included the worship of many gods (see verses 22ff). Here is a classic confrontation between the God of the Bible and idolatry. When we understand the idolatry of Athens, we can better understand how it differs from the Bible concept of “one” God.

17:17 – Paul reasoned with religious people in the public areas of the city.

Paul found the public places where issues of spiritual concern were discussed. As in every other place where he traveled, he reasoned in the Jewish synagogue. But in Athens he also found other places where public information was spread. Since the people of the city loved to discuss philosophy and new concepts, they discussed these in public places such as the marketplace. So, that is where Paul went to speak his message. Note his diligence for he did this daily.

17:18 – He discussed with Epicureans and Stoic philosophers.

Two of the specific groups with whom Paul carried on discussions were the Epicureans and Stoics. Note that it is clear Paul disagreed with these groups, yet they are mentioned by name. Some object to pointing out the errors of religious people, and especially to naming the groups we disagree with; but this passage not only says Paul disagreed with these people but it also names the groups. Why would it be wrong for us to do what Paul did and the Bible does? Should we not imitate faithful preachers and “speak as the oracles of God”?

Since the Bible does not explain exactly what these groups believed, we can only judge from human history, and that record does not seem conclusive. Some say Epicureans believed in pursuing pleasure as the

meaning and fulfillment of life. They indulged in wine, women, and song. “If it feels good, do it.” Others say they just believed in avoiding pain or suffering, so they would indulge in pleasure only to the extent that it did not produce suffering. They were materialists who believed in no existence after death, so one should enjoy this life without causing pain.

Some claim Stoics were the opposite extreme. They sought to be aloof, withdrawn, and indifferent to emotional involvement in life in any form. They thought men should avoid both joy and grief. But others say that they believed that a divine force called Reason controls the universe, so we should not complain no matter what life brings us.

These people held opposite extremes, but neither agreed with the gospel. Paul differed with them both. He preached to them about Jesus and the resurrection. We will see more detail in the sermon he preached later, but this is exactly what we need to preach about to people who don’t believe.

Preaching the resurrection would include judgment and eternal rewards; all these concepts would contrast with both philosophies. These philosophers viewed Paul as a teacher of new deities and wanted to hear more about what he said.

17:19-21 – Their interest in new ideas led the Athenians to seek to learn further about Paul’s teaching.

Paul had gotten their interest, so they took him to the Areopagus or Mar’s Hill. This was apparently a place where legal issues were presented and discussed. But especially it was a place where Paul could publicly address them all and explain his views.

Athenians were known for their insatiable interest in anything new or different. They spent their time in telling and hearing anything new. This curiosity seemed at first to be the main reason they were interested in hearing what Paul said.

People seem drawn toward extremes. Some people will not listen to anything that is new or different. Their minds are made up and they don’t want to hear anything new. Not even substantial evidence can sway them.

Other people are interested in anything new just because it is new, but they rarely commit themselves to accept or act on what they hear. It is an intellectual pursuit. All truth is relative, progress is good, anything new is acceptable. But they do not distinguish truth from error on the basis of evidence. Even if they did accept the truth when they heard it, they would just leave it for the next thing that came along. People of both extremes end up rejecting the truth that is supported by evidence.

The proper course is that of the Bereans: people who will listen to new ideas with honesty, but will accept only what can be proved by evidence to be valid. We must believe that absolute truth does exist and we will change our views when proved wrong. We should neither reject all

new ideas nor accept all new ideas. What we want is what is **true**, whether it be new or old.

17:22 – In the Areopagus, Paul began his message by observing the religious views of the Athenians.

Standing in the Areopagus, Paul began to present his evidence. His approach was to give proof. Remember that this speech was not addressed to Jews who believed in the true God but just didn't accept Jesus. That kind of hearer was approached in the manner of Acts 2,7,13, using Old Testament references and prophecy along with evidence of miracles. But these people were heathen idol worshipers to whom the Old Testament meant nothing. Paul began where they were. So, this sermon is most like the one in Acts 14.

He first observed that they were very religious people (superstitious – KJV). This may not have been intended either as approval or condemnation or their religious beliefs. It was simply an observation that got their attention and sought to begin on common ground. It would not offend them, but would get their attention.

Note that Paul soon made clear that these religious people were wrong. A person can be religious and yet not be right. It simply is not true that all religious people are pleasing to God, nor is it wrong to criticize religious beliefs.

17:23 – Paul had observed many expressions of worship, including one to a God the people did not even know.

The city was filled with altars (places of worship), temples, and other signs of idol worship (verse 16). Ancient historians agree with this description. One is quoted as saying that in Athens it was easier to find a god than a man! This grieved Paul, but he used his observation of it as an opportunity to teach.

One of the places of worship had written on it “to the unknown God.” They apparently were determined not to miss any! Paul used this as his opportunity and said he would tell them about that one they admitted they did not know about. By erecting that altar, the Athenians had admitted ignorance and had also admitted that they had reason to be interested in such a god; so Paul used this as his opening. This is great teaching skill.

17:24 – God created and rules heaven and earth.

Paul described the character and work of the true God, the God of the Bible. God made the world & everything in it (verse 24). He gives life and everything necessary to life (verses 25-28). All of us exist and live because of Him. He does not need our gifts – He is the giver of all we have.

This would contrast with heathen deities. Their gods were like supermen – superior to people, but not unlimited. Some of them might have originated and controlled certain aspects of the world, such as

crops and harvests, or the sea, or love. But the idea of one God who made everything in nature and sustained it all was **unknown**. Other Scriptures confirm the concept Paul taught here.

Genesis 1 gives the original account of the days of creation.

Acts 14:15,17 – Paul & Barnabas had previously taught idol worshipers to turn from these vain things (idols) and serve the God who made heaven, earth, and everything in them. He gives rain and fruitful seasons so we are supplied with food.

John 1:1-3 – Jesus is affirmed to be God (compare v14) in that He was with God (the Father) in the beginning, He was God (possessed Deity), and by Him were all things made. Nothing was made without Him.

Romans 1:20 – God’s power to create is one of the clearest proofs of God’s existence. There simply is no reasonable explanation for the fact the universe and life on earth exist except that God exists and created them. So, the existence of the universe shows that God exists and is powerful, even though we cannot actually see Him.

This principle is still foundational today. People around us may not worship images, yet many of them doubt that God created the universe. They need the same kind of reasoning as these idol worshipers. These people were searching for all kinds of new information, like many people today. But they were not aware of the obvious evidence that the creation of the world by God is the only reasonable explanation for the universe. So people today get all wrapped up in science and education, and end up denying the existence and/or creation power of God.

Because God is the Creator, He is also the Ruler.

Because He gives life to all of us, He has the right to expect us to live our lives as He commands. So He tells us we must obey Him and He will then judge us according to whether or not we do His will (verses 30,31).

Heathen gods were viewed as having authority, but only **limited** authority. The authority was chopped up and divided up among the gods. No one god had authority over **all men** everywhere – it depended on where you were and what you were doing as to which god was in control. And there would even be conflict among the various gods regarding their authority – gods would even war against other gods. Nations would war against one another, and the nation with the strongest god could defeat the other nation. Which god to obey was often a difficult issue.

The idea of one God who possessed all authority over all people everywhere was **unknown** to them. But if one God made everything everywhere, then it is reasonable that that one God has authority over everybody everywhere.

1 Chronicles 29:11,12 – Power belongs to God and He is exalted as head over all because everything in heaven and on earth belongs to Him. Power and might are in His hand and He rules over all.

Matthew 28:18 – Jesus also possesses this quality of Deity for He possesses all power in heaven and on earth.

Luke 6:46 – Why call me “Lord, Lord,” but don’t do what I say?

Again, people today need to learn this lesson. Some people may not bow to images, but they have other idols they serve instead, that keep them from obeying the true God. They live for money & possessions, for pleasure and fun, for family and friends, for popularity and fame, etc. These are their gods, even if they do not make images and bow to them.

17:25 – God does not need us. He gives life to all.

He does not dwell in temples made with hands (verse 24) and is not worshiped by men’s hands as if He was in need. He is the giver of all we have, so how can He need what we have?

Idol worshipers somehow thought they ought to give their gods gifts in worship, but they thought the gods needed these gifts to be sustained. So, by providing what the gods needed, the worshipers made the gods indebted to them. The gods would grant the worshipers’ requests in order to continue to receive their gifts. This view makes the worshipers in some ways greater than the gods!

The true God does not need us. He loves us and does good for us. But we need Him, not the other way around (James 1:17). He sustains us, we do not sustain Him. We ought to serve Him, not because He needs us, but because we should be grateful for all His great blessings and gifts. The fact that God does this for “all” demonstrates that He ought to be worshiped by all, not just by those in some particular area.

God is a living God who gives life to all.

We are **alive**. Where did our life come from? We cannot create anything and make it live if it was not alive to begin with. Living things are the offspring of living things. Gods made of non-living gold or silver, must not be living gods. So how could they make us? There must be an eternal living Being that gave us life, which means that God must be **alive**.

Idol worshipers may claim that their gods are not really images: they are living beings that are worshiped by **means** of the image. Even so, there is **no proof** the god is alive – it does not speak or move or act or give any signs of life.

The true God must be a living God because only a **living** God could create life. Such a God is **unknown** to idol worshipers. This idea also is taught elsewhere in Scripture.

Acts 14:15 – Paul & Barnabas said we should turn from vain idols to serve a **living** God. God is alive and truly involved in events on earth.

Daniel 6:25-27 – Darius knew Daniel’s God was the **living** God because He worked wonders such as saving Daniel from the lions.

Again, people today surely need this lesson. Some believe living things evolved from mud. Such beliefs hinder many people from believing in the existence today of a living God. But Paul answered this in Athens many centuries ago: how can life come from non-life? We are alive,

so how can we be the offspring of that which is not alive? No one has ever been able to prove that such a thing has occurred. [1 Thessalonians 1:9]

17:26 – God made all of one blood and determined their times and boundaries of habitation.

In particular, God made man, the human race, as one species all over the earth. The KJV and NKJV say one “blood.” The lesson, however, is that we are distinct from the animals but share a common nature with all humans. Animal blood is thoroughly distinct from that of people because animals have a different nature. All people are descended from Adam through Noah. All were created in God’s image, distinct from the animals (Genesis 1:22-27; 9:1-6; Acts 17:29).

Further, God controls the earth on which we dwell and which He created. He determines the limits of our habitation. Perhaps this refers to the fact that there are places suitable to man’s habitation and places unsuitable (such as the other planets). (McGarvey claims the “boundaries of habitation” refers to national boundaries, yet that seems hard to explain. The only sense I can see for that to be true would be that His general providence over men may allow or disallow certain nations to grow and prosper.)

Regardless of the specific meaning, the point is that God governs all people, Jew and Gentile. His control does not extend to just one nation, such as Israel, but to all nations. So we must all seek Him (verse 27) and submit to him (verses 24,30).

It also follows that, if man is one race, then racial strife and prejudice ought to be eliminated.

17:27 – All should seek God because He is not far from any.

God is not far from **every** one of us, so we can find Him if we really seek Him. This is true of **all** men, so God must be available to all men everywhere.

Heathen gods were gods of specific areas or localities. They could see what you were doing if you were in a certain place (sea, hills, nation). But you could hide or escape from those gods by going to some other place (other nation, etc.) where they might not be or might not control.

This cannot be done with the true God. He is always close wherever we are. He knows our needs and hears our calls. If we desire forgiveness and will come to Him according to the gospel, no matter where we are on earth, He will know and grant forgiveness. Such a God is **unknown** to idol worshippers.

Jonah 1:3 – Jonah illustrated the heathen concept of God. He thought by taking a ship to Tarshish he could escape God’s presence. But God saw him and proved to Jonah that God was still in control wherever he went.

Psalms 139:7-12 – Wherever I go, I cannot escape the presence of God. He is always close at hand seeing and knowing what I do.

Again, people today need to learn this lesson. People still think that they can hide from God or fool God. By doing evil in the dark, they fool people, so they act as though they can likewise fool God. They may think God is harder to fool than people, but somehow they conclude they can get away with it. But it will not work, because God is still not far from every one of us.

God's will can be known and learned.

He is not far if we will seek Him. This is why God is righteous in demanding obedience from all men and punishing those who do not obey. They are without excuse because they could know His will (Romans 1:20ff). If they could never know His will, it would be unjust to condemn them for not obeying.

But all men can see the testimony of God's existence in nature (Romans 1:20; Psalm 19:1). They should realize that He must exist and must have a purpose for making all this. He has created us as rational creatures, so it follows that He expects us to understand His will. It follows that He must be willing in some form to communicate His will to us, so we ought to seek to learn about Him and His will.

He promises that, if we sincerely seek to know Him and His will, we will succeed if we search with honest hearts (compare Matthew 7:7ff; 5:6).

Note how Paul's teaching throughout emphasizes God's interest in each individual person. God did not just create a universe to operate by law and then go off and leave it to function without Him. His providence, sustenance, and care extend to each individual. He gives life and all things to each one. He is not far from each one of us.

17:28,29 – Since God sustains our lives and we are His offspring, He cannot be an image made by man.

In God we live and move and have our being. Even some of their own poets admitted that we are the offspring of God. This again emphasizes God's involvement in the lives of each individual person.

If so, then we should not think of God as gold or silver, for how could living beings descend from gold or silver (see notes on verse 25)? Heathen idols were images made of gold, stone, etc., shaped by skill of men. But such things could never be **God**. The true God is our maker and we are His offspring. How can **we** be the offspring of something that **we** made (verses 28,29)? We would produce such a "god," rather than the other way around. God is **greater** than we are. But how could we make anything greater than we are?

17:30 – God commands all men everywhere to repent.

This follows from the fact that He is the Creator and ruler of all (see notes on verse 24). He has the right to expect all to obey Him and to demand that they repent of their failure to obey. Repentance requires men to turn away from their disobedience and determine to serve God.

The very fact that He requires repentance implies that all have sinned against Him (Romans 3:23) and that He holds them accountable for their sins (verse 31).

Specifically, men must repent of thinking God is gold or silver, etc. – i.e., men must repent of idolatry. Here is the bottom line of Paul’s message. He began by telling them of the unknown God, and ended by telling them that this God is the **only** God and the other “gods” men sought to worship ought not to be worshiped at all.

In the past, God had allowed the Gentiles to worship their idols. This does not mean He approved it or accepted them or would save them eternally despite it. It simply means He said little about it because He had given up on them (see Romans 1 and Acts 14, esp. notes on 14:16; compare Acts 7:42). He focused His efforts on the one nation of Israel and made little effort to reclaim the Gentiles.

Now, however, He had arranged a new system that included all men as recipients, Jew and Gentiles. He was making a renewed effort to reach Gentiles and was now proclaiming to them again that they must turn from idolatry and serve Him.

On the need for repentance, see notes on Acts 2:38 and 3:19. Compare Luke 13:3,5; 24:47; Matthew 21:28-32; Acts 5:31; 20:21; 2 Peter 3:9; 2 Corinthians 7:10. The fact that this is required of all men everywhere is proof positive that all are subject to the laws or gospel of Christ. He could not require obedience from them, nor could He demand that they repent of disobeying Him, if they were not subject to His reign.

This is courageous teaching for a man alone in the midst of the headquarters of idolatry!

17:31 – God will judge all mankind by the One He appointed. He proved this by raising Him from the dead.

God commands all men everywhere to repent because He has appointed a day when He will judge all men. This judgment will be righteous (fair or just) and is guaranteed by Jesus’ resurrection.

Idol worshipers may have had some idea of accountability to the gods – there might be some blessings or consequences for people’s conduct. But as already discussed, gods were often limited to certain areas of earth (a city, nation, mountain, sea), or a certain aspect of life (war, love, wisdom). The idea of **one** God who would judge **all men everywhere** for **all** aspects of life was **unknown**.

Romans 2:5-11 – God will judge **every** man (verse 6) according to his works. Eternal life will be given to **every** man (verse 10) who continues patiently doing good, but indignation and wrath to **every** man (verse 9) who does evil. This is true without respect of persons to people of all nations (verses 9-11).

Ecclesiastes 12:13,14 – We should serve God and keep His commandments because He will bring **every** work to judgment with **every**

hidden thing, good or bad. God's judgment is not limited to certain restricted aspects of our lives; He will judge **everything** about us.

2 Corinthians 5:10 – Again, Jesus is involved in this work of Deity because He is the judge. This is what Acts 17:31 said: we will be judged by the man that God raised from the dead. We will **all** be judged according to what we have done, good or bad.

Once again, Paul has expressed God's personal involvement in the life of each individual. Having created, ruled, and cared for each of us, He will hold us each accountable for how we respond to His care.

Again, people today need to be informed about this! People act like they think they can live as they please and no one will do anything about it. Or maybe they should make sure their parents or the police don't find out, but as long as they don't get caught by people, no problem. People commit crimes and wickedness of every imaginable kind and as long as people don't disapprove or don't punish them, they think they're off the hook. They need to realize they are accountable to God who will judge **everyone** for **all** their deeds.

God raised Jesus from the dead. There is life after death!

The proof God will judge men is the fact that He raised Jesus from the dead. People listened to many things Paul said, but what really caused a reaction was the preaching of the resurrection.

Idol worshipers may have had some legends about people being raised from the dead. But they surely had no historical proof or eyewitness testimony that it had happened. For God to do such a thing was to them an **unknown** idea.

1 Corinthians 15:1-8 – But the resurrection of Jesus is a matter of historical fact attested by many witnesses, including Paul. This testimony is conclusive proof that Jesus was raised from the dead. This in turn gives supernatural evidence that His claims are valid – proof that can be matched by no other religious system.

Romans 1:4 – Jesus was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection. This fact proves Jesus is who He claimed to be.

John 20:28-31 – Thomas, seeing Jesus had been raised from the dead, called Him “Lord and God.” Jesus then said all who believe this are blessed. The signs Jesus did, including especially the resurrection, are the proof that serves as the basis of these beliefs.

1 Corinthians 15:20-26 – Jesus' resurrection guarantees that we will all be raised. When the Judgment Day comes, most people who have ever lived will be dead – only a relative few will still be on earth. So, most people could not be judged and eternally rewarded unless they are raised. But Jesus' resurrection is the proof we will be raised and judged. Note here Jesus' involvement: He has the Divine power to raise the dead.

Again, people need to learn about this today. Many people do not believe in life after death – they think death is the end of existence. Others do not accept that Jesus is God's Son or the Bible is God's word. One

of the strongest proofs to answer these people is the resurrection of Jesus.

Here is clear historical proof that resurrection has occurred, that Jesus must therefore be the Son of God as He claimed, and the Bible which records all this is what it claims – the word of God. And someday we too will be raised and judged. When God through the Bible says we will be raised and judged, why should we believe it? Because there is historical proof that the judge has already been raised!

Note that, as at Lystra, Paul did not begin teaching idol worshipers by introducing Jesus into the discussion. The first point was to convince men to believe in the true God. He concluded by introducing Jesus as judge; but even then He did not name Him (at least not in the portion of the speech that Luke recorded, which may just be a summary of what Paul said).

What Paul preached at Athens is surely what many people today need to hear.

17:32-34 – Some people believed, some mocked, and some offered to listen to Paul again.

The people then reacted to Paul's message. It appears that their reactions interrupted his speech. We could reasonably assume that, if he had been allowed to continue speaking, he would have taught more about Jesus.

Interestingly, the reactions Paul received to his sermon are exactly the same reactions people today give to the gospel message. People fell into three categories:

1. Some people rejected the message and even made fun of it (verse 32). God's message has always been rejected by many. We should not be surprised when people react the same to our preaching today [1 Corinthians 1:18ff].

2. Some postponed a decision, and would make no commitment. They said they would consider it further (verse 32). Today, many do the same. Some of these will eventually be converted after they think about it more. But some are just stalling. They don't want to openly reject, because they know they cannot disprove the message. But they are not willing to make the commitment and sacrifice required to fully accept it.

3. Some people believed and accepted the message (verse 34). This included Dionysius and Damaris. There will be this kind today too. We should not allow criticism, mockery, and indifference to discourage us from preaching and teaching. There are honest people in the world who will accept the truth when it is presented today, just as in Athens.

Paul's message to ancient Athens is immeasurably relevant today. Many today need to consider the same aspects of God's nature and work that Paul preached then. Many need to consider the same evidence he presented, and many need to repent and obey God today just like those people then needed to do.

Acts 18

18:1-17 - Preaching in Corinth

18:1 – Paul left Athens and traveled to Corinth.

Paul moved on to Corinth (see *map*). Interestingly, we are not told why Paul left Athens. In nearly every other city, he left because of persecution, usually by Jews. This city of heathen idol worshipers may have mocked, but there is no evidence of persecution.

Corinth was ideally located for trade and commerce. McGarvey claims that, at the time of these events, Corinth was the chief city of all Greece. Trade made the city an excellent center of communication. If a faithful church existed there, it could effectively spread the gospel elsewhere.

However, the circumstances that made it such a good center of communication also resulted in effective spread of evil ideas. Corinth was known for evil and grossly immoral conduct. For example, Stringer cites evidence that the city had a temple to Aphrodite, goddess of love and fertility, where men “worshiped” by committing fornication with the more than a thousand prostitute priestesses.

18:2 – Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, who recently came from Italy.

In Corinth Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, a couple that became effective helpers in the work. Aquila was originally from Pontus, but had more recently moved from Italy because Jews were being forced by the emperor Claudius to flee from Rome.

Notice that it was not just Christians that were persecuted. Jews have been persecuted frequently throughout their history in various places at the hands of Gentiles. One would think that, as much persecution as they themselves had received, Jews would learn not to treat others in a way they would not want to be treated. Nevertheless, they were the most common persecutors of the early Christians.

Priscilla must have been an outstanding lady. Many preachers and teachers in the New Testament were married, including many apostles, yet their wives are rarely mentioned and almost never named. Priscilla, however, is mentioned as prominently as her husband is. It is clear that she and her husband worked side by side in the spread of the gospel.

It is not clear whether Paul taught and converted them or whether they had heard and obeyed the gospel elsewhere.

18:3 – Paul worked as a tentmaker along with Aquila and Priscilla.

For the first time we are told what trade Paul had. He was a tentmaker. This was also the work of Aquila and Priscilla, so Paul stayed with them and worked.

Paul frequently worked at a secular job to provide income. Later, writing to these same Corinthians, Paul explained that he had worked to provide for himself and had received support from other churches while at Corinth. However, he and other faithful preachers did have the right to ask for financial support from the churches (1 Corinthians 9:1-16; 2 Corinthians 11:8,9; compare Acts 20:33-35; Philippians 4:14-18).

Some people try to uphold Priscilla as a wife who had a career outside the home, thereby justifying the modern practice of women who leave their children with babysitters or daycare centers day after day while they work to make money.

However, (1) there is no indication Priscilla had children at home, let alone that she left them for others to care for. (2) Her job did not take her away from home and family. She worked **with** her husband. Indications are they worked where they lived or at least where children, if any, could be present and perhaps even help in the work. (3) Her work hours would be flexible because she worked with her husband in her home. She would not be required to work long hours at an employer's schedule, but could work when she and her husband thought best. Other God-given duties could take priority. Other women (such as farmers' wives) who work under such circumstances to help their husbands, not only are not sinful, but are admirable.

The issue of working mothers must be settled elsewhere, not here. As with Lydia in Acts 16, circumstances do not prove that the women did what modern mothers often do.

18:4 – Paul preached in the synagogue.

As in so many other places, Paul went to the synagogues to find people to teach. There he reasoned every Sabbath and persuaded Jews and Greeks. We have observed the approach so often we need not comment further here (see notes on 17:2,3). Note again that Paul reasoned with people. The gospel is based on evidence, and faithful preachers must present the evidence.

18:5 – Paul testified that Jesus is Christ.

In 17:15, while Paul was still in Athens, he had sent for Silas and Timothy. They arrived while he was in Corinth. This apparently gave encouragement to Paul, so he worked harder still testifying to Jews to accept Jesus as Christ (compare 17:3).

1 Thessalonians 3:12, however, implies that Timothy, at least, had joined Paul at Athens, but Paul had sent him back to Thessalonica to see how that work was faring. Apparently, here he and Silas then re-joined

Paul. Apparently, the books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians were written from Corinth during Paul's stay there, so they shed some light on the history.

18:6 – When the Jews opposed the gospel, Paul determined to teach Gentiles.

These Jews, like so many elsewhere, listened only for a while, then they opposed and blasphemed the word. To “blaspheme” means to revile or speak with contempt, especially against God or other religious, sacred things. In this case, they spoke against Jesus and His gospel.

As a result, Paul shook out his raiment (compare shaking the dust off the feet in 13:51; Matthew 10:14). This was a symbolic gesture showing disapproval and disassociation from those who were in error.

“Your blood be upon your own heads” means that Paul had taught them and they rejected the truth, so he had no more responsibility toward them. They themselves were responsible for their destiny. The implication, however, is that people's blood is on us if they die in sin and we have not made the effort to warn them. Like Paul, we must teach diligently so the blood of others is not on us. Compare Ezekiel 3:16-21; Acts 20:26,27.

18:7,8 – Paul taught in the house of Justus, and as a result many heard, believed, and were baptized.

Because of the opposition of the Jews, Paul left the synagogue and taught in the house of Justus, which was right next to the synagogue. The Jews apparently had eliminated Paul from their assemblies, but not from their vicinity. This arrangement perhaps gave Paul further contact with Jews as they went to the synagogue.

Yet despite Jewish opposition, the preaching of the gospel resulted in the conversion of Crispus, who was the very ruler of the synagogue, along with his household. This man must have possessed great humility, honesty, and courage to accept the gospel in the face of such opposition from the Jews of the synagogue he had ruled over. 1 Corinthians 1:14 lists a man named Crispus whom Paul himself had personally baptized. Presumably, this was the same man mentioned here.

Many other Corinthians heard, believed, and were baptized. Here is a very simple yet important summary of the pattern of conversion. This is exactly what Jesus taught in Mark 16:15,16 and is confirmed by many other passages. See summary ***chart*** on conversions. Despite the great wickedness so prominent in Corinth, the gospel still had the power to change many hearts.

18:9,10 – The Lord encouraged Paul that he would be protected from harm.

The Jews were creating fierce opposition against Paul's work. Many times he had fled cities because of such persecution. No doubt this led him to great fear, tempting him to keep quiet. In 1 Corinthians 2:3 Paul plainly acknowledged that his preaching in Corinth had been done with

fear and much trembling. We do not often see such expressions of Paul's emotions, yet we can surely understand them. Doubtless, many of us would keep silent under far less hardships. (Note that preaching the gospel without fear does not eliminate a sense of "fear and trembling." Powerful opposition may cause an emotional turmoil, but we must not let it keep us from speaking the truth.)

But God assured Paul that no one would attack him to hurt him. So, he should speak out without fear and not be silent. Paul would not have to leave this town because of persecution, at least not for some time.

God said He had many people in this city. This surely means many people had the kind of heart that God knew would be receptive to the gospel. He spoke of them as already His, though they had yet to learn and obey.

Compare John 17:4,11 where Jesus spoke of things as already accomplished though they were yet to be done. He was so sure it would happen and was about to occur, that He spoke of it as done. This is a similar case. No Calvinistic predestination here, for it contradicts too many other passages showing people have a choice in their salvation.

18:11 – Paul continued teaching in Corinth a year and a half.

Based on the Lord's reassuring promise, Paul continued there preaching 1 1/2 years. This is one of his longest stays anywhere (see verse 18 – it is possible he stayed even longer). Some people try to claim that it is wrong (or unwise) for preachers to stay in a city longer than Paul stayed in various cities. But remember that he almost never left cities by choice. He was forced to leave because of persecution. How long he would have stayed otherwise we have no way of knowing. In addition, of course, he stayed various lengths of times at different places, so we have no specific pattern. And he himself said that he preferred to preach in areas where the gospel was unknown (Romans 15:20,21), which he made clear was not what was expected of others.

During this relatively lengthy stay, Paul wrote several of his epistles encouraging Christians in churches where he had earlier preached. Specifically, he wrote to the Thessalonians to urge them to remain faithful despite the persecution that had forced him to flee there.

18:12,13 – Jews accused Paul before Gallio.

Luke then records a period of opposition Paul did face in Corinth; it occurred while a man named Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the region where Corinth was located. Stringer claims that Gallio's term as proconsul can be dated to AD 51,52. If that is correct, we can know approximately when Paul was there. Also, ruins still remain of the judgment hall where Paul would have been brought in this account.

Certain Jews captured Paul and took him before the judgment seat. They accused him of persuading people to worship God contrary to the law. The charge was not really true. Paul was surely violating no Roman

law, which was the law in effect in that area. Though Paul taught the removal of the Old Testament law, still this did not violate the Old Law since it had predicted its replacement by the gospel (Jeremiah 31:31ff). Nothing Paul taught actually contradicted the Old Testament but showed the fulfillment of it (Matthew 5:17,18).

18:14-16 – Gallio refused to judge matters of Jewish law.

The Jews had made a tactical blunder. Paul did not even have to defend himself, as he had on other occasions. In earlier persecutions before Roman authorities, Jews had accused Jesus, Paul, and others of having violated some Roman law. The charges were false; but by making an accusation based on Roman law, they hoped the Roman authorities would be upset.

However, the Jews were accusing Paul of violating their own Jewish law. Gallio proceeded to explain, even before Paul spoke in his defense, that he would not judge such matters. He said the Jews would have to settle such matters among themselves. Then he threw the case out of court. This event describes an example of some of the fairest treatment Christians ever received in the New Testament record at the hand of civil rulers. Such a man deserves respect in that regard.

18:17 – The ruler of the Jewish synagogue was then beaten.

God's promise that Paul would not be hurt had come true. He had been arrested, but was protected from harm. In fact, his enemies were persecuted instead. Some Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him instead. This man probably had taken Crispus' place (verse 8) and was strongly opposed to Paul.

So, those who had accused Paul were themselves punished. Remember that Jews had been expelled from Rome, so anti-Jewish sentiment may have prevailed in some Gentile communities. This was done before the judgment seat and was almost surely a miscarriage of justice. Gallio, however, ignored it; he may have thought it was deserved, since the Jews (presumably under Sosthenes' leadership) had attempted to mistreat Paul. Nevertheless, the beating was a miscarriage of justice and should have been stopped. At least once, however, a Jewish persecution had backfired!

18:18-22 - Conclusion of the Second Journey

18:18 – Paul remained still longer till he left for Syria with Priscilla and Aquila.

After this persecution, Paul remained a good while longer. He was not forced to flee as he had been elsewhere. It appears possible that verse 11 means Paul was in Corinth 1 1/2 years till the incident involving Gallio, and then stayed a long time after that. If that is the case, then we do not know how long he stayed altogether.

In any case, he finally left and set sail for Syria, apparently to return to Antioch from where the journey began. He took Priscilla and Aquila with him. Perhaps this implies he left Silas and Timothy in Corinth, since they are not mentioned. If so, then they were there even longer than he was.

We are told that Paul had shorn his head in Cenchrea because he had a vow. No further information is given, so we know nothing of the nature or purpose of the vow. A vow is simply a sacred promise to God. It could concern any subject at all. Paul's example indicates this was still an acceptable practice among Christians. Shaving the head was merely a customary sign of a vow. Jesus taught we should be sure we do not do such things for the sake of making an impression on men or seeking their praise (Matthew 5:16-18).

(Since a vow is different from an oath or swearing, there is no question of conflict with James 5:12 or Matt 5:33. Also, McGarvey explains that this was not a Nazarite vow, since in that vow the head could only be sheared at the temple in Jerusalem, whereas Paul sheared his head at Cenchrea – Numbers 6:13-21. In any case, there were other kinds of vows, so there is no reason to conclude this was a Nazarite vow.)

18:19-21 – Paul taught in Ephesus and left Aquila and Priscilla there, promising to return.

On this return journey to Antioch, Paul stopped at Ephesus (see **map**). Ephesus was reportedly the most important city in Asia at that time. Paul later wrote an epistle to the church there, and Jesus through John addressed it as one of the seven churches of Asia. This account describes some of the first gospel preaching done there.

Paul left Aquila and Priscilla there when he left town. But first, he himself spent some time teaching in the synagogue reasoning with the Jews as he so often did (see notes on 17:2,3). Interestingly, the people here were receptive. Unlike so many other places that ran him out of town, these people wanted him to stay longer! Yet having finally found a group of receptive Jews, Paul was not in a position to stay with them. Instead, he left and promised to come back later.

The NKJV and KJV add his reason for leaving (not stated in ASV). He wanted to “keep” (i.e., be present for) the feast in Jerusalem. Why he was so eager to do so is not stated, however such feasts gathered Jews from all over the world and were an excellent opportunity to teach. There is nothing to indicate Paul believed Christians should keep such feasts as religious ordinances (see Colossians 2:16,17).

18:22 – Paul then continued his journey to Antioch.

Paul's ship landed at Caesarea (see **map**). He greeted the church and then traveled to Antioch. This had been the beginning and ending points for each of his two preaching trips. If the KJV is correct about his

wanting to attend the feast in Jerusalem, then he no doubt did this during this time before he left on the next journey (some believe the Jerusalem church is “the church” that Paul greeted according to this verse).

Paul’s Third Preaching Trip – 18:23-21:16

18:23 – Paul began his third preaching trip.

Paul remained some time in Antioch and then began his third preaching trip. This time he passed through Phrygia and Galatia strengthening the churches (see *map*). This area included churches visited on both his previous journeys (Lystra, Iconium, etc.). How long this took is not stated, nor are we given details.

Note that faithful preachers and teachers of God’s word must emphasize, not just converting the lost, but also strengthening the saved. Too often people become Christians only to be left to their own devices by other Christians. In order to grow and remain faithful, those who are saved need further teaching and encouragement.

18:23-28 - The Correction of Apollos

18:24,25 – Apollos, an eloquent teacher, came to Ephesus and taught, knowing only as far as the baptism of John.

During the time Paul was away from Ephesus, yet while Aquila and Priscilla were still there, a man named Apollos came and spoke in the synagogue. He was originally from Alexandria (in the Egyptian river delta – see *map*). He was an eloquent speaker and knew the Scriptures well.

Note that eloquence is not required of a speaker. Apollos is one of the few men who are so described in Scriptures. It is not wrong to be eloquent, but God does not require it in those who speak His word, therefore we should not require it. (Remember Paul’s comments about human wisdom in speech – 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.)

Apollos was zealous in speaking what he knew and he knew some things about Jesus. What he taught was presented accurately, as far as it went. However, he only knew as far as John’s baptism (see 19:1-6 for further discussion). John had come to prepare the way for Jesus and had pointed people to follow Jesus. Apparently, Apollos knew some of this, but not enough to understand properly New Testament baptism.

18:26 – Aquila and Priscilla instructed Apollos more fully.

When Aquila and Priscilla heard Apollos teaching in the synagogue, they took him aside and explained more accurately the ways of the Lord. Several important lessons need to be considered:

1) Incomplete knowledge is not enough. Ignorance is no excuse. Apollos knew some things, but he lacked knowledge and needed to be corrected. We should not overlook the error people embrace simply because they are right in some areas.

2) Religious zeal is not enough. Apollos was zealous in speaking the truth he knew. But he was still in error on some points and needed to be corrected.

3) Error should be corrected, no matter how eloquent or influential may be the person who is responsible. It is easy to think we should keep quiet for the sake of unity or peace or because we fear that conflict or rejection may result. Would we have the courage and willingness to correct such an influential, powerful speaker as Apollos?

4) All people should be humble enough to listen when other people seek to correct them by God's word, and should be willing to admit when they have been shown to be wrong. Apollos could easily have become so proud in his abilities that he would not listen to correction. Instead, he was willing to learn from others who had more knowledge than he had.

5) John's baptism was not sufficient after Jesus died. Acts 19:1ff shows that John's baptism prepared the way for Jesus' ministry and death. But since He died, we must practice the baptism of the gospel (Mark 16:15,16), which looks back to His death as a completed work (Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:3,4). People today who claim to practice John's baptism are in error.

6) Women are not permitted to teach men when the church is assembled as a congregation or in any other capacity that involves authority over men (1 Timothy 2:11,12; 1 Corinthians 14:34,35). However, they can still teach others (Titus 2:4,5), and they can even impart information to men so long as they do it outside congregational assemblies and in a submissive manner. Passages that limit women in teaching are not intended to forbid all teaching. Women have a definite role and should be encouraged to fulfill it.

18:27,28 – The disciples in Ephesus assisted Apollos when he determined to go to Achaia.

Apollos then became an effective worker for the Lord. He is mentioned by Paul elsewhere, yet we are never told much about him. One thing he did, as recorded here, was to preach in Achaia. This is the area where Corinth was located, and Paul later mentioned that Apollos had preached in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:10-13; etc.).

When he decided to go there, the brethren in Ephesus wrote and exhorted the Christians in Achaia to receive Apollos. He helped the believers there, publicly refuting the Jews by proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ.

Note that disputation with people in error is both Scriptural and worthwhile, even when done in public. Paul, Stephen, and Jesus also practiced it, as well as Apollos who is here commended for it. We must remember, however, that God's word must be the authority we appeal to and we must speak from sincere concern for the souls of others (compare Acts 17:2,3).

Also notice that we have here an approved Bible example for letters of commendation when faithful Christians move from one area to another. It is Scriptural and proper to investigate the background of someone who comes to us from another church; and it is proper, when a member leaves one local church, for that church to provide information to help others know whether or not to receive the one who has moved away. See notes on Acts 9:26ff. See also Romans 16:1,2; 2 Corinthians 3:1.

Acts 19

19:1-7 - Twelve Disciples Immersed Again

19:1,2 – At Ephesus, some disciples told Paul they had never heard about the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The account next returns to the work of Paul. While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul came to Ephesus on his third preaching trip. He found there some disciples whom he asked whether they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed. They said they had never heard of such a thing as the Holy Spirit. (Presumably, they knew that the Holy Spirit exists, but did not know that it was possible for people to “receive” Him.)

Receiving the Holy Spirit here must refer to miraculous powers of the Spirit (tongues, prophecy, or miracles, etc.). This was the power of the Spirit that Paul eventually gave them (verse 6). He was clearly not referring to the indwelling of the Spirit. He would know that all saved people receive the indwelling; and the only way anyone can know he has received it is simply by the fact he has done what is necessary to be saved. So, if that were the issue, Paul would have simply asked them about their salvation. It follows that the context implies the reference is to miraculous measures of the Spirit.

Of itself, the very fact that Paul asked the question proves there were people in those days who were saved but did not have miraculous powers. It turned out that these men were not baptized properly, so it follows that they had not done what they needed to do to be saved. Yet, the men were called disciples, indicating they had a form of faith in Jesus and were considered by other people to be disciples. Paul evidently assumed they were already saved; otherwise, he would have begun by asking them about their relationship to Jesus. So, Paul’s question implies that the men might be saved but might not have received miraculous powers of the Spirit (compare 1 Corinthians 12:29,30; Acts 8:12-19). If all saved people have miraculous gifts, as some people claim, Paul’s question was pointless.

As a teaching observation, note that Paul started by finding out where the students were so he would know where to begin in teaching them. An excellent way to do this is by asking questions as Paul did here.

19:3 – The men had received only John’s baptism.

Paul then asked what baptism they had received, and they said they had received John’s baptism. If these men had never heard about miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit, that would mean they had never

known people who had miraculous powers. They had never known men could confirm their preaching by miraculous powers of the Spirit (John's baptism had not been accompanied by such miracles – John 10:41).

This would imply that they had not heard of the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Since Pentecost, men had been preaching the gospel by the guidance of the Holy Spirit and had confirmed their message by miracles. Since these men knew nothing about this, it was doubtful they had ever heard the true gospel (Acts 1:8). Therefore, Paul moved to the very basics and asked about their baptism.

Some people conjecture that these men had been taught and converted in Ephesus by Apollos, who knew only John's baptism (18:24-28). This may be, yet one wonders why Apollos did not then go back and teach these men more perfectly after he himself had learned the truth. Perhaps this knowledge of John's baptism was somewhat widespread in that area and several other people had the same problem as Apollos.

19:4 – John's baptism prepared the way for Jesus' work.

Hearing that they knew only the baptism of John, Paul explained why John's baptism was insufficient. It is possible that not all the differences between John's baptism and gospel baptism have been revealed to us in the Scriptures, since this information is not necessary to us today. It is sufficient for us to know John's baptism is not valid today and to understand the gospel baptism that is valid.

However, Paul describes some differences here. John's baptism, though it required repentance, yet looked **forward** to the coming of the One for whom John was a forerunner (Jesus). Jesus had not yet died when John baptized people. His was a baptism of **preparation** looking forward to Jesus' death.

A fundamental characteristic of the baptism of the gospel, however, is that it looks **backward** to Jesus' death as an accomplished fact. We are baptized **into** His death, picturing His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12). **Before** we can be baptized, we must believe in Jesus as God's Son who has been **raised** from the dead (Romans 10:9,10; compare Mark 16:16; Acts 8:36-38; 1 Corinthians 15:1-7).

It necessarily follows that John's baptism cannot be Scripturally applied to anyone after Jesus' death. Some have wondered whether or not people, if they received John's baptism **before** Jesus died, had to be baptized again with gospel baptism after He died. I am unsure. There is no need for this information to be revealed in the New Testament since, as already stated, we do not need to understand John's baptism today. By the time the Scriptures were written, John's baptism was no longer valid. This is the main point we must understand today.

19:5 – The men were then baptized under the gospel.

These men clearly understood the impact of Paul's teaching. They had been baptized, but not with the baptism that is necessary to salvation. If they wanted to receive salvation through Jesus' death, they had to be Scripturally baptized with gospel baptism in Jesus' name (compare Acts 2:38). They did so.

(1) This shows an important example for us today. If a person received a form of "baptism" which does not agree with the gospel, that baptism is not valid. Since baptism is essential to salvation, it must be done properly for the person to be saved.

(2) Specifically, the **purpose** of baptism and what the person **understands** are important. Even if the baptism is an immersion (like John's) and is done because God commanded it, that is not enough. When one is baptized, he must understand the connection between baptism, Jesus' death, and forgiveness. In short, one must understand and believe that baptism is necessary to receive forgiveness by Jesus' death and resurrection, and he must do it for that reason (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Mark 16:16; Romans 6:3,4; 10:9,10; Galatians 3:26,27).

(3) If anyone does not understand this purpose of baptism or otherwise does not do it for that reason, he does not have a valid baptism. Many people today have been baptized by churches that teach that baptism is not necessary to salvation or that people are saved by "faith only." Though these people have been baptized, they did not do it with an understanding that the baptism was necessary to contact Jesus' death (see the Scriptures above). Like the men in this context, they have not yet received a Scriptural baptism. They too need to be baptized Scripturally to receive forgiveness of sins.

(4) In particular, there are some still today who claim that they are followers of John the Baptist, practicing his baptism, and even claiming to wear his name. These people are in the exact same condition as the men here and they need to do what these men did.

19:6,7 – Paul then laid hands on the men so they received the Holy Spirit, spoke in tongues, and prophesied.

After these men were baptized, Paul laid hands on them so they did receive the Holy Spirit. They spoke in tongues and prophesied. This shows that Paul's original question about receiving the Holy Spirit referred to miraculous powers of the Spirit. A total of twelve men were involved. (Note that the gift of tongues was explained in Acts 2. See our discussion there. Nothing in this context gives any reason to believe that the tongues received by these men differed in any way from the tongues on Pentecost.)

We have here yet another example in which miraculous powers of the Holy Spirit were given by the laying on of apostles' hands, as occurred with the Samaritans. Never did anyone receive miraculous gifts

of the Holy Spirit without the direct involvement of a qualified apostle. See our notes on Acts 8:14ff for more information.

19:8-20 - Paul's Miracles and Their Effects

19:8 – Paul preached for three months in the synagogue.

Paul continued in Ephesus for three months preaching boldly in the synagogue, reasoning and persuading regarding the kingdom of God. Reasoning and persuading is exactly what he did elsewhere (see notes on 17:2,3).

Note that the topic of teaching was the kingdom. This was the kingdom Jesus and John the Baptist had said was coming. Jesus had promised it would begin in the lifetime of people in His day (Mark 9:1), and He told the apostles it would begin when the power came in Jerusalem soon after His ascension (see notes on Acts 1:3-8). This was fulfilled on Pentecost (see also notes on Acts 2). So, as in Colossians 1:13, all people who are delivered from sin become part of Jesus' kingdom. This shows that the kingdom must have been in existence then; it is not something which today is still in the future.

Since Paul was clearly preaching to unconverted men telling them the basics of what is necessary to be saved and become a Christian, this shows that preaching the kingdom is fundamental to gospel preaching. And since the kingdom is the church, here is another example showing the need for preaching about the church to non-Christians (see notes on Acts 8:5-12).

The Jews in the synagogue in Ephesus had been unusually receptive when Paul taught there a short time on his second journey (18:19,20). Here they allowed him to teach there for three months. That seems a remarkable degree of toleration compared to the many other places where Paul had been ejected from the synagogue after just a few Sabbaths.

19:9 – When some rejected the message, Paul withdrew and taught instead in the school of Tyrannus.

Despite the relatively receptive attitude, eventually many became hardened, refused to believe the truth, and openly opposed it. Note that the true teachings, that God commands His people to follow, are here called simply "the Way."

Because of the opposition to the truth, Paul separated the disciples from them and met in a different place. As in other instances, when the Jews became hardened, Paul began teaching Gentiles as well as Jews (v10). Note that again people were taught till they resisted the truth, then efforts were turned to others.

The place where he taught was the school of Tyrannus. This apparently refers to the building where the school met. There Paul gave people daily opportunities to hear the gospel. Teaching the gospel is not limited to the first day of the week.

(So far as I can tell, the term for “school” here refers to the building in which education occurred. This is what is indicated in dictionaries that define the word. It does not mean that Paul taught in the classes conducted by the school – though I do not doubt that he would have taken such an opportunity had he been invited to do so, just as he taught in the synagogue, etc. In any case, the school was not set up to teach the gospel as part of its purpose for existence, for it evidently existed before Paul began preaching there.)

19:10 – This teaching continued for two years, so that the word of the Lord was spread throughout Asia.

Paul used the opportunity to teach both Jews and Greeks. No doubt others besides Paul were involved in this teaching, yet it is a challenge to us to imitate their example and spread the gospel throughout our area.

During this two-year period, Paul wrote the books of 1 Corinthians and Romans.

19:11,12 – Paul did great miracles so that cloths carried from him caused miraculous healings of the sick.

Little has been said in the record for a while about miracles. This account makes clear that they were continuing to be done. Paul did miracles so amazing that people could be healed or demons cast out simply by contact with a piece of cloth that Paul had touched. This again shows the supernatural power of true miracles. They were events impossible by natural power but which proved that God worked through the inspired men. These concepts have been discussed repeatedly in the book of Acts (see our notes on previous examples).

Note: Did the handkerchiefs have healing power in themselves? No more so than any other handkerchiefs. Who would doubt that the power was in God? But the cloths served as a point of contact by means of which the power came to the people. (Handkerchiefs touched by other people could not heal anyone; so when they were healed by those Paul had touched, they would know the power came through Paul.) No one could miss this point.

Why cannot people see that the same is true spiritually for baptism? The power to forgive sins is not in the water, but immersion in water is the required condition whereby people come in contact with the saving power of Jesus’ blood. When people believed that they could be healed by touching these handkerchiefs, would any sensible person have accused them of believing that they had earned their healing or that they had been healed without the power of God? Surely not! Why then would any sensible person claim (as many do) that, when a person believes that he must be baptized to be saved, he somehow believes that he can earn his salvation or be saved without the power of Jesus’ death?

19:13 – Jewish false teachers tried to duplicate Paul’s miracles.

In those days, even as today, there were false “miracle-workers” who tried to duplicate the miracles done by true prophets of God. In this case, certain wandering Jews claimed to be exorcists (men who cast out demons). They even tried to appeal to the name or authority of Jesus. However, they took the power on themselves. They had never really been given the power from God.

Note that false teachers may in fact claim to act in the name of or by the authority of God or of Jesus, but that does not mean that God really sent them. The mere fact that one **says** he acts in Jesus’ name does not prove that He is really doing so (see Matthew 7:21-23). Acting in Jesus’ name is not just something we say. It requires truly following his authority as revealed in His will.

Today we have people claiming to do all kinds of activities in the name of Jesus, which Jesus never authorized. This often includes attempted miracles (as with these men), acts of worship, church organizations and work, doctrines regarding salvation, and whole hosts of other practices. When people practice what Jesus never actually taught, then their teachings or practices have no more power to please God or accomplish His work than did the acts of these false exorcists.

19:14-16 – Seven sons of Sceva were overpowered by an evil spirit.

In this case, seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, tried to cast out a demon in Jesus’ name. But Jesus had not sent them so they had no real power; as a result, the demon overpowered them. He said he did not know their power, yet he knew Jesus and Paul. He caused the man in whom he dwelt to leap on the men and overpower them, so they had to flee from the house naked and wounded.

Modern fake healers usually do not fail as spectacularly as did these frauds, but that is because the power of demons has been limited since the first century. Nevertheless, observe that the people could tell that these men were frauds because, when they claimed to do miracles like Paul and Jesus did, their works could not measure up to the characteristics of true miracles. Likewise today, we can tell fake miracle workers from the true by comparing the results of the “miracles.” Those who cannot do the kinds of works done by Jesus and His apostles are fakes. That turns out to be the case with all modern “miracle workers,” since none are from God. The power to do miracles has no longer been needed since the gospel was completely written, so miracles ceased (1 Corinthians 13:8-11; Compare Simon in Acts 8:5ff; Elymas in Acts 13:10ff; etc.)

Note that God can overpower any demon, but men without God’s power are weaker than demons. The demon recognized the power of Jesus and Paul, but not the power of these other men. This is an important lesson. Paul could stand up to the demons and overpower them, because

he had God's true power working in him; but these sons of Sceva failed because God was not with them. So, you and I have the power to defeat Satan and his fiery darts when we are on God's side; we can have His power working in us (Ephesians 6:10-18). But if we face Satan and attempt to defeat him on our own, he will overpower us without mercy. We cannot stand against Satan without God's power.

Note also that this event exposed a common error of occult practices. People in the occult often believe that they can control the power of spirit forces by means of secret words (incantations, mantras) or rituals. Simply by chanting or calling on those words ("hocus pocus," etc.), they believe they can compel spirit beings to do their will. So, these exorcists appear to have thought that Paul did miracles just by citing Jesus' name, so they could do the same. The power, they thought, was in the name or the ritual. The truth, however, is that God's true power is available only to those who are obeying Him and acting in harmony with his authority. He repeatedly teaches that we cannot have His blessing simply by reciting His name or other words. We must be dedicated to a life of faithful service (Matthew 6:7; 7:21-23; etc.).

19:17 – The event worked out to the glory of Christ.

As a result of this event, both Jews and Greeks throughout Ephesus heard of this event. This caused them to fear and to praise Jesus' name. The people saw the difference between true miracle power and fake. They saw the evidence of Paul's miracles and the failures of those who were not really from God. This amazed them and encouraged faith in Jesus, which is exactly the purpose of miracles. But when false workers claim power they do not have, they are exposed as frauds today, even as these men were.

19:18-20 – As a result, many people left occult practices and burned their books of magic.

Specifically, people who believed also confessed their evil deeds and turned away from the practice of magic. They brought their books of magic and burned them publicly. The total value was 50,000 pieces of silver. This illustrated the power of the word of God in men's lives.

When people accept the gospel, they not only reject fraudulent false teachers who are not from God, they also reject magic, sorcery, astrology, and all aspects of the occult (compare Simon and Elymas as in Acts 8 & 10; Acts 16:16ff; Galatians 5:19-21; etc.). It is clear that these were popular and prevalent ideas among the people. They are also becoming more prevalent in our society.

Further, we are shown that repenting of sin requires one to cease the practice of it and also to remove from his life all forms of evil practices (26:20). This is "making restitution" or bringing forth "fruits of repentance." Note that these people did not just sell the books and make money off them, but they destroyed them so as to stamp out their evil

influence. To sell them would have allowed the evil to continue to influence others. Instead, by destroying them publicly, they not only eliminated the evil influence of the books but also became an influence for good.

Finally, note that God's word and power is not harmed by confrontation with error but is magnified. Some people think we are unloving if we attempt to confront evil. Others think that the existence of religious frauds justifies rejecting all religion. The truth, as revealed in this instance, is that God's people should speak out against religious error and demonstrate what God's true teaching is. The contrast just makes God's will shine more brightly.

19:21-41 - Riot at Ephesus

19:21,22 – Paul decided, about this time, that he was ready to go to Jerusalem and then see Rome.

20:31 shows he had been there over three years. This had been one of his longest recorded stays anywhere. He wanted to visit the areas where he had preached on his previous journey in Macedonia and Achaia. Then he hoped to go to Jerusalem and eventually to Rome.

This plan led him to send two of his coworkers, Timothy and Erastus, ahead of him into Macedonia. Meanwhile, he lingered awhile in Asia. This is the first mention we have of Erastus. It is obvious that various different men worked and traveled with Paul at various times.

1 Corinthians 16:8 states that Paul wrote the first letter to the Corinthians while he was in Ephesus. Presumably, this occurred during the period referred to in these verses of Acts. Paul's reference here to his plans to pass through Macedonia and Achaia probably refers to the trip he would make to help the messengers who would be carrying the funds collected for the church in Jerusalem (see 1 Corinthians 16:1-4).

19:23,24 – Demetrius the silversmith began conflict.

While Paul was tarrying in Ephesus, a great commotion began regarding the Way of the Lord (i.e., the gospel and the way of life it teaches). This was begun by a silversmith named Demetrius. He and other craftsmen made much profit by making silver shrines (probably small statues) to the goddess Diana.

Diana (Greek Artemis) was an ancient fertility goddess. In Ephesus was a great temple to this goddess (v35), which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The people of the city were deeply attached to the temple and the worship of Diana. And the silversmiths were deeply attached to the money they made off the shrines!

19:25-27 – Demetrius called a meeting of the silversmiths and reminded them of the wealth to be gained by making statues of Diana.

Paul was a threat to their wealth because he taught that nothing made by hands could be a god (compare 17:29). Demetrius said that, not only would such a doctrine ruin their business, but it would also lead to the downfall of Diana and her great temple.

Most of the persecutions Paul endured came from Jews and generally was achieved by means of falsehoods and misrepresentations, motivated by jealousy and desire for power. But when persecution came from Gentiles, here as in Acts 16:16ff, the problem was often caused by greed. People were making money off their false religion and they did not want people cutting off their source of income! This is often true today. Criticize a man's religion and he may be upset. Hit his pocketbook and he may become violent!

In this case, the charges against Paul were basically true. He did teach that gods made with hands are not true gods. Note that the concern these men showed demonstrates that Paul's work was well known and was having an effect among the people. Why else would these men have any concern?

Note further that none of the men expressed any consideration regarding the question of what may be **right** about the matter. No one even mentions the possibility they should investigate the **evidence** and see who had the **truth**. The issue was money and that was enough!

19:28,29 – The silversmiths then began a riot and captured some of Paul's traveling companions.

The silversmiths became so angry that they began to shout, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" Stirring up the masses seems much easier if you have a good slogan. Regardless of whether or not it is true or pertinent, a pithy saying that appeals to the masses is always useful in such cases.

The sentiment spread, like riots often do, till confusion reigned throughout the city. The people managed to capture two of Paul traveling companions, Gaius and Aristarchus, men from Macedonia. They took them into the theater. This was a place for entertainment and meetings of various kinds. Its ruins still stand in Ephesus today. As in Thessalonica (17:6), the troublemakers could not get Paul, the ringleader they sought, so they settled for smaller fry.

Note again that Paul had several traveling companions who have not been mentioned before this incident. Men with these same names are mentioned again in 20:4, which lists the men who traveled with Paul to deliver the funds to Jerusalem. It is likely that this is the same Aristarchus mentioned in 20:4 and who accompanied Paul to Rome in 27:2. However, Stringer argues that it cannot be the same Gaius, since this one

was from Macedonia, and the one in 20:4 is from Derbe. See also 1 Corinthians 1:14; Romans 16:23; Colossians 4:10.

19:30-32 – Paul was restrained from addressing the mob.

Paul wanted to go speak to the people as he sometimes did on other occasions (22:1ff). Perhaps he wanted to reason with them and even use it as an opportunity to teach.

However, there are times when teaching is too dangerous and a waste of time because of the attitudes of the people. This was a wild mob that had just caught two of the people they considered of lesser importance. If they captured the ringleader, no telling what might happen. The disciples refused to allow Paul to go in. Even the officials of the region of Asia, some of whom were Paul's friends, urged him not to go among the mob.

The mob became so wild that people did not even know why they were rioting. They were confused, some shouting one thing, but other people shouting other things. No one really knew what was happening or why. Isn't that like people so often? We get carried away with emotion and excitement and act in ways that, later on, we ourselves cannot explain!

19:33,34 – A Jew named Alexander attempted to make a defense, but was shouted down by the mob.

It is interesting how the Jews always seem to be involved in these things one way or another. Usually they caused the persecution. But even when Gentiles caused it, the Jews would somehow become involved! Compare 18:17.

This time the Jews had a spokesman named Alexander. He would have made a defense to the people. On this particular issue (idolatry), the Jews agreed with Paul. However, it is possible in this case that the Jews wanted to do all they could to disassociate themselves from Paul. We don't know what Alexander would have said, however, because the people would not let him speak! When they found out he was a Jew, the mob yelled for about two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

19:35,36 – The city clerk finally calmed the people, affirming the greatness of Diana.

The town clerk managed to quiet the mob enough to reassure the people that everybody knew the great reputation Ephesus had as the center of worship for Diana. She had (allegedly) come down from Zeus, the chief god. They were responsible to keep her temple.

Since all this was known, why should they carry on so? They needed to calm down and not do anything rash that they might regret later. The point seems to be that they had nothing to prove. No one could or would compel them to quit serving Diana. Why did they need a riot to convince anyone?

19:37-39 – He argued that the craftsmen should pursue the matter lawfully in the courts.

He pointed out that the men they had captured had done nothing to destroy or plunder the temple. Nor had they blasphemed the goddess. They had, of course, taught against idol worship in general, but they had done nothing specifically or maliciously against Diana. How much the clerk understood of the real issue is not clear, but his point was that there was no evidence that Paul or his companions had harmed property, practiced violence, or otherwise broken any law. At most, they had simply expressed a viewpoint for others to consider.

He then referred the crowd to due process of law. They were subject to the Romans and there were courts and judges to decide such matters. If Demetrius and the silversmiths had a complaint, they could take the matter to court and have it decided in a lawful assembly. The same could be done by anyone else who had any other complaint.

19:40,41 – He then urged the crowd to end the riot because it was illegal.

There was no justifiable cause for it. It was disorderly, and Roman officials looked with strong disfavor on such things. They did not mind letting local people control their affairs as long as they did so peaceably. But when violence broke out, especially involving large numbers of people, the soldiers would be very upset.

Specifically, the city officials (like this clerk) could get in big trouble when there was a riot for no apparent reason. So, he dismissed the assembly and urged them to go home.

So once again Paul's work had stirred up severe opposition, showing how effective he was as a preacher. In this case no one was physically harmed as a result of the riot, but imagine how you would feel if you had been there in the place of Paul, his companions, or any of the Christians!

Acts 20

20:1-16 - Visit at Troas

20:1,2 – Paul left to return through Macedonia and Greece.

Even before the riot in Ephesus, Paul had determined that he wanted to leave and go through Macedonia and Achaia (19:21). The riot, however, hastened his departure. He called the disciples, encouraged them, and left for Macedonia.

2 Corinthians adds helpful information about events that occurred during this period, but Luke does not record them. In his concern for the problems in the church in Corinth, Paul had sent the letter of 1 Corinthians to them by Titus as a messenger. Having left Ephesus, he went to Troas. Even though the Lord opened a door of opportunity there for him, yet Titus did not arrive with news about conditions in Corinth. Paul was so troubled to hear this news (and probably still upset over problems in Ephesus), that he could not bring himself to stay in Troas but traveled on to Macedonia. (See 2 Corinthians 2:12,13.)

2 Corinthians 7:5-12 adds that even then Paul was beset by troubles, conflicts, and fears. Finally, Titus arrived with the good news that Corinth had received the letter of 1 Corinthians well and had corrected several problems, including the problem caused by the man who had been committing adultery with his father's wife (1 Corinthians 5). However, the book of 2 Corinthians shows that he still had enemies in the church at Corinth who opposed his apostleship. To correct these problems, he wrote the book of 2 Corinthians and sent it by way of Titus. He intended to travel to Corinth himself to confront those who opposed him and also to carry to Jerusalem the funds the churches of Achaia had gathered (12:14; 12:20-13:2).

So the account here in Luke simply adds that he passed through Macedonia encouraging the brethren, and came to Greece. This apparently referred to Athens and the area of Corinth (Achaia) as he had planned.

20:3 – After three months, Paul returned to Macedonia.

Paul spent three months in Greece. When he was about to leave by ship to Syria (where Antioch was), it was found that the Jews were plotting against him. So, instead of sailing, he returned by land through Macedonia.

Luke gives no details here, but other passages show that one of the main purposes of Paul's travels at this point was to gather funds from

the churches of Macedonia and Achaia to take to the needy saints in Jerusalem (see 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9; Romans 15:25-28; compare Acts 24:17). The local churches had collected this money already, so Paul passed through the area to encourage them to complete the work, and to accompany their messengers to take the bounty to Jerusalem. Paul's travels from this point on, therefore, did not allow him much time to visit at places along the way. He was determined to move on to Jerusalem.

McGarvey adds that during this stay in Corinth Paul wrote the books of Romans and Galatians. Romans specifically mentions that Paul was about to go to Jerusalem to take the funds for the needy saints in Jerusalem (15:25-28).

20:4 – This verse names the large group of men who accompanied Paul.

These men were messengers of the churches carrying the money from the churches to Jerusalem (see 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8:19,23). Some of them are mentioned elsewhere, but others are not:

Sopater of Berea (son of Pyrrhus – ASV) – compare Romans 16:21

Aristarchus of Thessalonica – 19:29; 27:2; Colossians 4:10; Philem.

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Secundus of Thessalonica

Gaius of Derbe – 19:29

Timothy was frequently mentioned previously and later.

Tychicus of Asia – Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 4:7; 2 Timothy 4:12;

Titus 3:12

Trophimus of Asia – Acts 21:29; 2 Timothy 4:20

20:5,6 – Paul and his company traveled to Troas.

The various individuals named went ahead of Paul and waited for him at Troas (see **map**). Paul himself traveled by land to Philippi (v3). There he was joined by Luke (“we”), and they sailed to Troas.

They left after the days of unleavened bread (Passover), but wanted to be in Jerusalem by Pentecost (verse 16). This gave them 50 days to make the trip. They took 5 days sailing to Troas, where they waited 7 days.

20:7 – Paul spoke at a meeting of the church in which they had the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week.

The disciples in Troas met on the first day of the week to break bread. At that time Paul preached to the people. He was planning to leave the next day, and continued speaking until midnight. Apparently, he had much to say but not much time to say it. Since he was a visiting apostle, whom many of the people in Troas knew or knew of, they no doubt wanted to make the most of this opportunity to hear him, and he wanted to make the most of the opportunity to teach them.

Does “break bread” here mean the Lord's Supper?

The expression “break bread” here must refer to the Lord's Supper as it does in Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 10:16; and 1 Corinthians 11:23,24. This phrase, in some contexts, does refer to a common meal (see Acts 2:46 and notes there). However, that cannot be the case here because this context clearly refers to a worship assembly of the church (Paul preached, etc.). Paul had already written the epistle of 1 Corinthians saying that Christians were not to eat common meals in their worship assemblies (1 Corinthians 11:17-22,34). Would he here violate the very thing he had taught in 1 Corinthians 11?

Note also that Paul was in a hurry to leave and get to Jerusalem (v16 – see notes below). Why wait seven days and then leave by land if v7 is just referring to a common meal? They could have done that on any day, and there would be no great reason for Paul to want to attend such a meeting anyway. But if this is the Lord's Supper and it is limited to a certain day of the week, everything here makes sense.

If this is just a common meal, why tell us the day and all the details, as here described, but never anywhere tell us the day for the Lord's Supper? All the information below, about the importance of memorials and knowing the day for them, would also indicate that Acts 20:7 is talking about the Lord's Supper. Otherwise, we have no way of knowing when to have the Lord's Supper. God simply would not leave such an important issue unrevealed.

[Commentators who agree this is the Lord's Supper: McGarvey, Zerr, Lenski, Clarke, Henry, Barnes, Robertson, Vincent, Vine. Some of these say a common meal was eaten in connection with the Lord's Supper.]

On what day should we have the Lord's Supper?

Many denominations have the Lord's Supper once a month, once every three months, once a year, only on special holy days, or just whenever they feel like it. On the other hand, the Catholic Church and other groups offer the communion on weekdays. Some members of the church choose not to attend when the saints commune on the first day of the week even though they could come.

Basic principles to remember

We must practice what the gospel authorizes and only that (Matthew 15:9,13; Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Colossians 3:17; Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; 3:5,6; Revelation 22:18,19).

God teaches us, not just by direct commands and statements, but also by means of examples and by reasoning to valid conclusions that necessarily follow from what is stated (1 Peter 2:21; Philippians 3:17; 4:9; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Hebrews 5:14; Acts 17:1-3; compare Matthew 22:23-32; Hebrews 7:11-25; Matthew 19:3-9; etc.).

We must also take into account the teaching of other passages on the subject (Acts 3:22,23; Matthew 4:4,7). By taking all the Bible says in direct statements and examples, putting the information together and drawing the proper necessary conclusions, we can know the truth of God regarding when to have the Lord's Supper.

God has always set a time for His memorials and feasts.

The Lord's Supper is a memorial feast. We eat food in memory of the death of Jesus, as instructed by God (Matthew 26:26ff; 1 Corinthians 11:23ff; etc.). In the Old Testament, God instituted a number of other memorials and feasts. These are not in effect today (Hebrews 10:9,10; Galatians 3:23,24; 5:1-4; Colossians 2:14,16; etc.). But we can still learn from them some useful lessons (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:1-12).

Whenever God authorized a special memorial or special feast for man to observe in worshipping Him, He has always told man *when* to do it. Examples:

Passover (Exodus 12:6,14,24ff) was on the 14th day of the 1st month. Hence, an annual feast.

Feast of Trumpets (Leviticus 23:24) on 1st day, 7th month. Hence, an annual feast.

Atonement (Leviticus 23:27) was on 10th day, 7th month. Again, an annual feast.

Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:39-44) on 15th Day, 7th month. Again, annual.

Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11) was the 7th day of week. So, it was a weekly memorial.

Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7) was on the 1st day of week. So, it is also a weekly memorial.

If the Lord's Supper does not have a specified time and frequency for partaking, then it is the only one of God's appointed memorials or appointed feasts in history that does not. And it is a memorial to the most important event in history! Why would God go to all the trouble to design the memorial or feast, describe in detail how to do it, then leave no guidelines at all about when?

When God names a *day* for observing an activity, the language also necessarily implies *how often* it should be done.

Consider the Old Testament examples already listed. In most cases, God simply said a *day* to have it, and the people were expected to understand from that *how often* to have it. They were to have it *every time* the specified day came around. When God set a *day* for the observance, then that also settled the *frequency*. This was a "necessary inference."

If a feast or memorial was to occur on a certain day of a certain month of the year, then the people would do it as often as that time occurred; hence, an *annual* feast. If it was stated to be on a certain day of

the month, then as often as the day of the month occurred, it would be observed; hence, a **monthly** observance (Ezekiel 46:1,6,7). If it was to occur on a certain day of the week, then it would be done as often as that day of the week occurred; so, it would be a **weekly** observance (such as the Sabbath).

In the same way, by the nature of the language, the frequency for the Lord's Supper is **every** first day of the week. The day for observing the Lord's Supper is the first day of the week, but every week has a first day. Therefore, whenever the first day of the week comes, the disciples should come together to break bread.

Note the parallel to the Sabbath:

Exodus 20:8,10 – Remember the Sabbath day (7th day) to keep it holy.

Acts 20:7 – Disciples came together on the first day of the week to break bread.

Exodus 20:8,10 was understood to mean to remember **every** 7th day to keep it holy, though the word “every” is not used. Likewise Acts 20:7 means we should come together every first day to break bread.

By what Bible authority would it be done some other time or frequency? If we respect Bible examples and if we must find our practices authorized in the gospel, then we could no more have the Lord's Supper at other times than we could baptize babies or sprinkle for baptism.

The significance of the context of Acts 20:7

Folks sometimes wonder if the preacher must preach till midnight and somebody fall asleep and die, etc., since those things also happened in this inspired example. Yet the context shows that these were unusual circumstances. It is clear that these were not normal, let alone required, even of the disciples at Troas. If so, then surely they would not be required of us. The example teaches us, but what it teaches is that such events are unusual, not required!

Someone may then ask whether it might also have been an unusual, exceptional circumstance for the disciples to come together on the first day for the Lord's Supper. But the context clearly shows that this was not a special occasion that the church met to hear the visiting apostle preach. The passage says they came “to break bread,” not that they came because there was a visiting apostle (verse 7). The implication is that this was the typical time the church met for the Lord's Supper, and Paul used it as an occasion to teach them.

Paul was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem. He was in such a hurry that he left the next morning after staying up all night (verses 8-16). And as it was, he had to wait in Troas 7 days till the church met (verse 6). If it was all right to have the Lord's Supper on any day, why wait so long to call the meeting?

Note that Troas had advance notice of Paul's coming. His travel companions had arrived ahead of time and met him there (verse 5).

Knowing this, why wait till the last possible day, make Paul stay up all night, and make him leave by land instead of on his boat? Why not just call the meeting 2 or 3 days earlier? Clearly there was some reason the first day of the week mattered.

And why especially mention the first day of the week in connection with this meeting? Other passages show that churches sometimes had special meetings called for special purposes, but when that happened we are never told what day of the week they were. If no other day is ever mentioned, why mention this day unless there was significance to the fact that this was the day the disciples came together to have the Lord's Supper?

The evidence indicates this meeting was the normal practice of the church and the first day of the week was especially significant. If we respect Bible examples, then, we will come together to break bread on the first day of the week.

Teaching of Other Passages

Some ask why we don't have the Lord's Supper in an upper room (third story) as in Acts 20:8,9. The answer is that, when we study other passages, we find there is no significance to the place. For example, the church in Jerusalem met in a porch of the temple (Acts 5:11-14).

What about the teaching of Acts 20:7 that the church had the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week? Does teaching elsewhere modify this conclusion or does it tend to strengthen that conclusion?

Acts 2:42 – The first converts “**continued steadfastly**” in breaking bread as well as the apostle's doctrine, prayer, etc. “Continue steadfastly” does not define **how often** the disciples had the Lord's Supper. But it tells us it was a regular event, commonly done among them, and they had a sense of commitment to do it.

Hebrews 10:25 – The church had regular assemblies and the members were expected to not miss. This does not mention the Lord's Supper, nor does it tell how often the assemblies occurred. It does, however, reinforce the idea of **regular** meetings. And it shows members were to have sense of commitment to those meetings.

1 Corinthians 11:17-34 – Jesus wants all His people to remember His death (verses 23-26). We need a sense of commitment to participate in this act regularly. The Lord's Supper was partaken of when the church assembled (verses 20,33; compare verses 17,18,34).

This passage does not, however, tell what day or how often this should be done. It simply says that it should be done in the **manner** here described “as often as” it is done. This expression simply means “whenever” or “every time” – see NIV, NEB, Wms, Knox, Gdspd, etc. Example: We will deduct income tax from your check as often as you get paid.

1 Corinthians 16:1,2 – Corinth had been ordered to take up collections on the first day of the week (like Galatia was already doing). This

clearly implies assemblies on the first day of each week. Further, this was an ongoing practice done repeatedly on the first day of each week (see NASB, NIV, REV, NEB, Thayer, Arndt & Gingrich).

Note that the passage says the same thing about collecting money that Acts 20:7 does about the Lord's Supper – they were both done on the first day of the week. Denominations often have the Lord's Supper once a quarter or once a year, but have the collection every time you turn around. The Bible says the same thing about both.

Put all this together with the fact that Acts 20:7 says the disciples came together on the first day of the week to break bread, and we see a pattern. The churches assembled regularly, including assemblies on the first day of the week. When they assembled on the first day of the week, they had the Lord's Supper and they took up a collection.

There is no indication the Lord's Supper was taken at times other than the first day nor that it was taken less often than on the first day. Instead, the pattern of other passages implies that the practice of Acts 20:7 was the practice of the church.

The Significance of the First Day of the Week

Why would God choose the first day as the day for the Lord's Supper and collection?

Mark 16:9 – Jesus arose on the first day of the week. The resurrection of Jesus is unquestionably one of the greatest events in the history of the world. All four gospel accounts tell us repeatedly that Jesus arose on the first day of the week. Why this emphasis on the first day unless there is some significance to it? (Luke 24:1,4,21; Mark 16:2; Matthew 26:1-7; Luke 24:1-9; John 20:1-10; see also the verses under the following points.)

John 20:19 – Jesus' appeared to His disciples several times on that first day of the way after He had been raised (Mark 16:2,9; Matthew 26:1,8-10; Luke 24:1,19-21,33-40; John 20:1,11-19). The appearances of Jesus are also crucial to our faith because by them He proved to the world He really is the Son of God (Romans 1:4; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8).

John 20:26 – The second day Jesus appeared to the disciples was also a first day of the week. This was the eighth day after the first appearances. The way days were counted would make this the next first day of the week (compare Leviticus 23:39).

Acts 2:1 – The day of Pentecost was a first day of the week (Leviticus 23:15,16). Note the great events that occurred on this first day of the week: (1) The Holy Spirit came. (2) The gospel was preached for the first time. (3) The first people were converted and became Christians. (4) The church began (compare verse 47). And from this time on they **continued** in, among other things, the Lord's Supper (verse 42).

Acts 20:7 – The disciples came together on the first day of the week to break bread. This may be the only time the Lord's Supper is directly mentioned on the first day of the week, but it is certainly not the only

passage that shows the first day of the week is significant. Nor is it the only passage that shows the disciples assembling on the first day of the week.

1 Corinthians 16:1,2 – The churches took up collections each first day of the week.

Many of the greatest events in the history of the church occurred on the first day of the week. And four of these occasions describe Christians assembling on the first day of the week, and a fifth surely implies assembling. How can anyone doubt God's emphasis of special significance for the first day of the week?

By contrast, ***not one time*** is any other day of the week named as being a day where anything of significance happened. The second day of the week, third day, etc., are never mentioned. The seventh day is mentioned only in connection with meetings of Jews, never in connection with meetings of Christians or any events of special significance to Christians. Why all this emphasis on the first day unless there is something special and significant about it?

Conclusion: Bible authority teaches us to have the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week. To have it any other day is to act without God's authority. Therefore, Christians must have the Lord's Supper each first day of the week and must refuse to eat it on any other day.

20:8,9 – Eutychus fell out a window and died.

The meeting was held in an upper room (third story). It was night as Paul continued speaking, so there were lights in the room. (Note that Paul was long speaking – verse 7. The fact it was night and dark proves nothing about when the meeting began. It follows that we should not conclude that the Lord's Supper must be eaten at night, since we have no idea from the record what time of day it was when this meeting began.)

A young man named Eutychus was sitting in the window and fell asleep as Paul preached so long. Finally, he fell out the window and was killed by his fall. Note that the Scripture says without doubt or qualification that the young man was dead.

Some people have used this story to justify people falling asleep during services. This is strange reasoning. The purpose of preaching in our assemblies is to teach God's word, and the reason for coming is to be edified and exhort one another. All things should be done to edify, without confusion, decently and in order (Hebrews 10:24,25; 1 Corinthians 14:26,33,40; Acts 11:26; etc.). How can one be edified or exhorted when he is asleep? Why should anyone who understands the purpose of our assemblies want to justify people in going to sleep? (Note Matthew 26:36-40.)

Just as there are exceptions when people cannot come at all, so there may be exceptional circumstances when those who come cannot stay awake (medical problems, working all night the night before, etc.).

Eutychus may have been such a case, but his case was clearly exceptional. Paul was long preaching. If Eutychus justifies sleeping during preaching, does he also justify falling out of a window and killing oneself? Clearly all of this was an unfortunate circumstance to be regretted, not justified or imitated.

But many people make a habit of sleeping during preaching. They are not an exceptional case because the preacher preaches till midnight nor any other circumstance beyond their control. Does Eutychus justify this? Is all sleeping justified? Does sleeping ever indicate indifference and lack of zeal and interest in God's message? Is it ever a form of disrespect for God who gave the message? If so, then it is a genuine matter of concern.

20:10 – Paul raised Eutychus from the dead.

Paul went down and fell on the young man and embraced him. He then said the young man was alive, so there was no reason for grief. Verse 9 had clearly said he was dead. Verse 10 then says that his life was in him, after Paul embraced him. This cannot mean he never died, for that would contradict verse 9. The point must be that through Paul God did a great miracle and restored Eutychus to life. So here is another miracle of resurrection revealed in the Scriptures. Verse 12 says this gave great comfort to the people, for the young man was definitely alive.

The gospel records other examples of people, besides Jesus, who were raised for the dead (Lazarus in John 11, Dorcas in Acts 9, etc.). What modern faith healer can duplicate such an event? The young man clearly died and then was clearly alive again. The miracle occurred in the presence of people who knew him best. It manifests all the characteristics of miracles that we have repeatedly observed in Acts – characteristics that modern faith healers do not demonstrate. This fact, as repeatedly observed earlier in the book, shows that the claims of some today that they have power to do miracles like in the Bible are simply untrue.

20:11 – Paul then ate, talked till daybreak, and left.

After raising Eutychus, Paul returned to the upper room, broke bread and ate, spoke with them a long while till daybreak, and then left. It is amazing how willing these people were to listen to this man of God. This was admittedly an unusual circumstance with a visiting apostle. Yet, these people were interested in truth. We should be the same.

Does the breaking of bread in Acts 20:11 refer to the Lord's Supper or a common meal?

If it is the Lord's Supper, does that prove we may have the Lord's Supper after the first day of the week is over or that we should have it on Saturday night? If it is a common meal, does that prove the church may sponsor common meals for the members?

We have already shown on verse 7 and 2:46 that the expression "break bread" can refer either to the Lord's Supper or to a common meal.

The issue must be decided by context. What does the context indicate here?

* Only Paul – no one else – is said to have eaten. But the disciples came to eat the Lord's Supper. If they came to eat and if this is the Lord's Supper, why is only Paul said to have eaten? (McGarvey implies that the traveling companions must have eaten also at this time, but verse 13 implies that they left at a different time, so it is possible they were not there when Paul ate.)

* The disciples had come together to have the Lord's Supper (verse 7 – see notes there). Verse 11 occurred a number of hours later. Surely they did what they had come together to do, rather than waiting until the wee hours of the morning to do it. Some may not have been able to stay so long. They would want as many as possible to be able to partake (1 Corinthians 11:17ff), so common sense and good judgment would have dictated that they have the Lord's Supper before the events of verse 11.

* The phrase “and ate” added to “break bread” implies a common meal (see Acts 27:35; compare Lenski). If the point is that Paul presided at the Lord's Supper, then why doesn't it say he broke the bread and gave to the others so they could eat, like in the examples of the institution of the Lord's Supper?

* Paul intended to depart the next day (verse 7 – the “morrow” – KJV). But he left at the break of day (verse 11), so **daybreak was the next day**. It is hard to know whether Roman time is used here or Jewish time. But regardless, the following must be true: (1) They came together on the first day of the week (verse 7). (2) Paul intended to leave the next day, and daybreak was the next day. (3) The healing of Eutychus and the breaking bread in verse 11 occurred after midnight (compare verses 7ff), so by either method of counting time, whatever happened in verse 11 would have been “the next day” just as much as daybreak would have been the next day.

Since they came together to break bread on the first day of the week, they must have done what they came to do. So, the Lord's Supper was done on the first day of the week. Then Paul then preached till midnight, healed Eutychus, broke bread then talked till daybreak (the next day) and left. If daybreak was the next day (no longer the first day of the week), then the breaking of bread in verse 11 must have been the next day too, no matter what time was used. But if it was the next day, then it was not the first day, and therefore it was not the Lord's Supper, because they ate the Lord's Supper on the first day.

If Jewish time was used, they must have come together before sunset, eaten the Lord's Supper, then Paul preached till midnight, etc. It would have become the “next day” at sunset. If Roman time was used, then they could have come together anytime before midnight and eaten the Lord's Supper. Then after midnight would be the next day. In any

case, they ate the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week, but v11 occurred the "next day." So verse 11 refers to a common meal, otherwise the church did not eat the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week as they came together to do.

Instead of accepting a view of verse 11 that contradicts what the passage says the disciples came to do, we should assume they did what they came to do: they ate the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week. That means verse 11 must be a common meal, because it occurred on the next day.

* The expression that Paul "talked" a long while implies informal discussion, rather than the preaching of verse 7 (see Robertson, Lenski). This implies that the assembly as such broke up after Eutychus' resurrection, and what followed was simply the kind of informal talk that often happens after meetings.

* Paul was about to leave on a journey. Such would require nourishment, so it is reasonable that verse 11 refers to a meal that was needed to prepare Paul for his journey on foot.

Nothing says who provided the meal. He may have brought it with him to eat before he left. I know of no one who objects if the preacher brings a lunch to the church building when he goes there for a Bible study. This discussion would be comparable to the visiting and discussions that commonly occur following our worship assemblies. Such may happen where the church met, before or after a church assembly, but it is individual activity and in no way proves the church should undertake such as church activity. The "upper room" could even have been someone's home.

Or the church may have fed Paul as a form of support and encouragement for his work of gospel preaching. He had just preached and was traveling on an errand for the churches. It would be as appropriate for them to feed Paul as it would be for them to pay him money as support, but neither the food nor the money would be given to all the members. Nothing is said about anyone else eating, so nothing more can be made of this. (See Acts 20:36-38; 21:4,5,16; 27:3; 28:14,15; 15:3; Romans 15:24; 1 Corinthians 16:6,11; Matthew 10:5-15; Luke 10:1-16; 9:1-6; 2 Corinthians 1:16; Titus 3:13; 3 John 6.)

There is no proof here that the church had the Lord's Supper on a day other than the first day of the week as stated in verse 7, nor is there proof that the church in general assembled to eat common meals as a church activity. Those who seek to defend such are obligated to find proof of it. There is surely nothing here that convincingly demonstrates such.

* These commentators agree this was a common meal: Barnes, Henry, Clarke, Lenski, Zerr, Vine, and Stringer. These say it was the Lord's Supper: Robertson, McGarvey.

20:12 – Euthchus was then alive.

See notes on verse 10. Surely this happened before Paul left in verse 11. It is a “flashback” in the history.

20:13,14 – Paul left on foot to catch up to the ship.

Paul’s companions, including Luke (“we”), had been present for the meeting in Troas (note “we” in verses 6,7,8 in ASV, though the KJV does not have “we” in verses 7,8). However, they left before Paul did (“went ahead”) in order to catch a ship (“then” means after the resurrection of Eutyclus in verse 12, not necessarily after Paul left at daybreak in verse 11). Paul went by land across the peninsula and caught up with the ship. Perhaps this was done so he could stay longer with the disciples in Troas.

He met the ship at Assos, where he boarded and they went on to Mitylene (see *map*).

20:15,16 – Paul determined not to stop in Ephesus.

The ship passed Chios, then stopped at Samos, where they stayed at Trogyllium (not mentioned in ASV). The next day the ship landed at Miletus, not far from Ephesus (see *map*).

Paul, however, did not think he had time to visit even in Ephesus. Despite his closeness to the brethren there, he wanted to move on because he was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost.

We are not told why it was so important to be at Pentecost. Probably it was so he could teach the crowds there like he did in Jewish synagogues. Remember, however, that he and his companions were messengers carrying the funds that churches had donated for the needy saints in Jerusalem. Apparently, they wanted to make these funds available for the needy before Pentecost.

Note again that the time pressures Paul faced make it clear that there was special significance to the first day of the week. If he was in such a hurry, why wait seven days to meet on the first day with the church in Troas and then leave by land? The whole trip could have been made much easier if the Lord’s Supper had been eaten on any earlier day – especially on Saturday – if that were permissible.

20:17-38 - Paul’s Visit with the Ephesian Elders

20:17 – Paul called to him the elders of the Ephesian church.

As Paul passed by Ephesus, he determined he did not have time to visit (verse 16), so while the ship was at Miletus (see *map*), he called the elders of the Ephesian church to meet with him.

We have earlier read about elders in local churches (11:27-30; 14:23; chapter 15). In every case, there was to be a plurality of these men appointed in each local church. This example also illustrates this point. The church in Ephesus had elders, plural. In the gospel, no one man by himself ever had oversight of a local church.

“Elder” (πρεσβυτερος) – “...elder; used 1. of age ... advanced in life, an elder, a senior: ... 2. a term of rank or office; ... a. among the Jews ... b. among Christians, those who presided over the assemblies (or churches) ... they did not differ at all from the ... bishops or overseers...” – Thayer

As Thayer points out, “elder” is just a different term for the office of bishop. It is also the same as pastor. We will see these other terms used in verse 28. At this point we should remember that Paul is addressing the elders. The context will give significant information about who elders are and what they are to do.

Further, the descriptions as used here, show this term refers to a very well defined group in the church. It does not refer just to any and all older people or older men, as some claim. Why would Paul want to visit with just the older people and not the younger ones, if the reference was just to older men in general? Who would be most likely to be able to make the journey to see Paul: older people or younger ones? And how would it be determined who was old enough to go? The whole scene makes good sense if the elders were a well defined group of men/officers appointed to the work described in verses 28ff. Otherwise, it makes no sense.

20:18,19 – Paul reminded the elders of the work he had done among them.

When the elders arrived, Paul discussed the work he had done, reminding them that they knew about his work. He did not need to go into detail, for he had not worked in secret. He would later use his work as a means to make applications regarding the work they needed to do. There are many lessons also for all Christians to learn regardless of whether or not we are elders, especially regarding preaching and teaching God’s word. The implication of Paul’s statements here is that we should follow apostolic example. If this is not the point, why bother to discuss this?

Paul had faced many trials because of the plots of the Jews. This humbled him, but also brought many tears. This gives useful insights. We have often read how Paul had been hounded by Jews and run out of many cities, yet rarely have we been told of the emotions this must have brought. Here we are told that it did cause great mental anguish and tears. In a sense, we can rejoice during persecution (5:40-42), but that does not eliminate the emotions of grief and heartache.

Bible accounts of such persecution, when they occur, are generally quite calm and factual with little or no expression of emotions. Yet in other passages, such as here, people looking back may express the emotions that occurred at the time. Why do the historical accounts not describe in more detail the emotions involved? It is not that emotions are wrong, since other accounts describe the emotions. I conclude that God does not want our emotions to determine what we view as right or wrong. Our service to God may result in emotions, but the emotions

should not determine what we practice. God's will must be done regardless of the emotions involved. Perhaps also the writers seek to present factual historic accounts and do not want to include anything that might cloud or appear to cloud the factual accuracy of their records.

20:20 – Paul taught everything that people needed whether in public or from house to house.

Despite the persecution and heartache, Paul did not slack or compromise in his teaching. He preached all that they needed to hear in order to please God and be saved, keeping back nothing that was profitable (v27). Preachers today must imitate Paul in this.

We must preach all the truth, everything that is profitable or needed for people to please God (Matthew 28:20; 2 Peter 1:3; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; James 2:10; Acts 3:22,23). Even if we face persecution and even if people do not want to hear the message, we must say what they need to hear rather than what they want to hear (2 Timothy 4:2-4).

It is so easy to compromise or even just keep quiet. Even when we know the truth and know people need to live it, we may make excuses for not proclaiming it, especially when facing hardships. Others preach what they think will bring them popularity, money, fame, or favor with people in high places. Yet souls are at stake and they must know the truth so they can correct their lives to please God. Paul preached all that people needed to hear, and so must we.

Paul did this preaching both publicly and privately (from house to house). Preachers today must learn the value of both kinds of teaching. Some are excellent in the pulpit but do little or no home teaching. Others are excellent in a private setting but neglect to study God's word and prepare useful, well-arranged, and concise messages for public teaching. Faithful preachers should be like Paul and realize the value of both.

Public preaching reaches larger numbers of people at once. More good may be done in terms of the number of people benefited. But often people have spiritual problems, the nature of which cannot be adequately dealt with publicly. Some will not come to public meetings and can only be reached privately. Some have problems of a confidential nature that they will not discuss publicly. Others have private sins that ought not to be revealed to others (Matthew 18:15ff). Still others will not see the application of public preaching to their lives until that application is personally pointed out to them.

Both public and private teaching have advantages. Faithful preachers should see the advantages of both, develop their teaching abilities to the fullest in both areas, and be willing to put time and effort in both areas.

20:21 – Paul taught a message of faith and repentance to both Jews and Gentiles.

He was not partial to one group or the other. He knew the gospel was for all, so he taught it to all. Likewise, we should not limit our preaching to any specific group of people but should carry the message to people of all races, all nationalities, all social levels, all ages, etc. (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:39; etc.).

His message was repentance toward God and faith toward Jesus. Both faith and repentance have been emphasized throughout the book of Acts and we have studied numerous examples where these concepts have been taught.

This expression does not mean, of course, that we do not believe in God but only in Jesus, nor that we repent toward God but not toward Jesus. Paul is emphasizing that both repentance and belief are needed. No one will truly believe in Jesus unless he also believes in God, and no one can truly repent toward God unless he repents toward Jesus. This is taught elsewhere.

The fact that repentance is mentioned before faith likewise does not mean that people should repent of sins before they believe in God. Any proper understanding would show that no one would repent of sins if he did not believe in God. But the order in which the terms are listed does not necessarily indicate the order in which they must occur. Note the order of sanctification and faith in 2 Thessalonians 2:13 and confession and faith in Romans 10:9. Further, the repentance here emphasized is toward God, but the faith is toward Christ. Perhaps the point is that one must repent of any improper attitudes toward God in order to properly believe in Jesus.

See verse 24 regarding testifying and testimony.

20:22,23 – The Holy Spirit had testified that chains and tribulations awaited Paul in Jerusalem.

Having taught in Ephesus (as he had elsewhere), Paul was bound in the spirit (i.e., he had determined within himself) to go to Jerusalem. He apparently saw the need to preach there, but especially he was traveling (as already discussed) with the messengers who were taking the funds the churches had collected for the needy saints in Jerusalem.

Yet, he admitted that he did not know exactly what to expect there. He did know that, everywhere he went, the Holy Spirit (through inspired men) told him that chains and tribulations awaited him there. An example of such a prophecy will be recorded in 21:10ff. These predictions would be fulfilled as Luke's record continues.

20:24 – Paul was determined to continue his work of preaching regardless of such persecutions, even if he had to die.

Despite the predictions, Paul was willing to suffer for Christ. He had proved this often in the past as he had suffered repeatedly for the gospel's sake. It had happened even in Ephesus, and these elders would have witnessed it (verse 19).

But he was willing to go further and even give his life for the gospel if this was needed in order to fully accomplish the purpose for which he had been called, which was to preach the gospel. His life was not so valuable to him that he would let death threats keep him from doing what he should do. He described this as one who was finishing a race and faced hurdles or hardships in the way. He was determined not to let these keep him from reaching the goal. We need the same courage and determination that nothing – not even death threats – will prevent our work for the Lord.

Paul's courage and dedication are admirable. Yet one cannot help wondering why he was so determined to travel to one particular place: Jerusalem. Surely there were multitudes of other places where he could preach. While he was willing to give his life if necessary, yet he had often fled cities to save his life. He did not quit preaching but just went elsewhere to do it. Why not go elsewhere now and continue more years of work for the Lord? Were not the predictions of the Spirit warnings to him not to go? I have no answer except that perhaps he thought delivering the funds for the needy was so important that he felt compelled to continue.

Note that he referred to his ministry as testifying to the gospel. He was a witness of Jesus' resurrection. No one today can testify as he and other apostles did. We can only call people's attention to the testimony given by the eyewitnesses. But Paul himself was an eyewitness, so his work constituted testimony (see verse 21).

It was a testimony of God's grace because men who believe and repent (verse 21) can receive forgiveness of sins by God's grace. Grace is unmerited favor. Men do not deserve eternal life, but by God's mercy they can be forgiven and have that hope.

The message Paul preached about this grace is here called the gospel of the grace of God. No one can understand God's grace except as taught in the gospel. Grace is not something mystical that people can define or determine for themselves what it will do apart from revelation. We should preach what the gospel says about grace, not our own human opinions or wishful thinking.

20:25 – Paul was convinced he would never see them again.

Though Paul was unsure what would happen at Jerusalem, he was nevertheless convinced that he would never again see these Ephesian elders. He had preached the gospel of the kingdom among them. They had

labored side-by-side facing dangers and hardships. Yet he was convinced this would be no more. This is surely sad to consider, and its effect on these elders is described later (verses 36ff).

1 Timothy 1:3; 3:14, however, seem to indicate that Paul did later hope to visit Ephesus. Perhaps by that time these elders would no longer be there or at least that Paul's visit was so brief that he would not be able to see them. Some claim that perhaps Paul here expressed just his own personal foreboding about the future, not a prediction of the Holy Spirit (note verse 22 – he did not know what things were before him).

Note that preaching the true gospel requires preaching the kingdom (see notes on Acts 8:12).

20:26,27 – Paul stood innocent of guilt for he had fully declared the gospel to them.

Since Paul did not expect ever to see them again, he had some parting words for them. First, he wanted to testify that he was innocent of the blood of all men (compare 18:6). He was not responsible for the eternal destiny of any who might be lost. He had fully preached the message of the gospel (verse 20). If they were yet lost, no one could hold him responsible.

Note the implication that, if we do not fully preach the message, then we may be held responsible (see Ezekiel 33:1-9). This is here expressed as though their blood would be upon him: They would die, but he would also be responsible for it.

Here is another serious matter for preachers of God's word to contemplate. If we do not fully preach the message and souls are lost, God will hold us accountable. Note that, to avoid being so accountable, we must preach fully the whole counsel of God (see notes on verse 20). Preaching only part of God's word may lead some to be lost for lack of knowing that part that we failed to preach.

20:28 – Elders should take heed to themselves and to the flock where they are overseers, shepherding the church which Jesus purchased with His blood.

Since Paul was not going to see them again, he proceeded to give parting advice to the elders about their work. He told them to be watchful or on guard, first for themselves. Elders must set good examples (1 Peter 5:1-3). No one can be an elder unless he meets certain requirements that require him to be careful of his life (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).

Then Paul warned them to be watchful for the whole flock. They are shepherds guarding the safety and well-being of the sheep (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-4). They will be held accountable for their efforts to guard the sheep so they do not go astray or be destroyed by wolves (verses 29,30). They cannot care for the flock without being on guard.

Paul said that the Holy Spirit makes men overseers. He does this by stating in the gospel the qualifications men must meet in order to be appointed as elders (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). This is the same way the Spirit makes men Christians. It is not a direct, personal, individual appointment, but the Spirit gives the commands and requirements men must meet to be elders, just as He does for Christians. When people meet those requirements, then the church is commanded by the Spirit to appoint those men as elders.

Elders as a local office

Paul charged them to guard the flock where they had been made overseers. In their case, this was the flock at Ephesus (verse 17). Each church has its own eldership (Acts 14:23). The eldership is a local office; and each eldership should oversee just one local church, the one among them (1 Peter 5:2,3). There is no authority for elders to assume oversight for the work or funds of many churches to do a general work which is the responsibility of many churches or which is as much the responsibility of other churches as it is of the one among them. In fact the only times churches sent money from one church to another was in cases where the receiving church had destitute members it was unable to care for. The money was sent only to the extent of the need and only so long as the destitution continued. See 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9; Acts 11:29,30.

These principles maintain the local nature of the work of elders and the independence of the local churches. These principles are violated by church contributions to centralized institutions or sponsoring elderships, whether in evangelism or benevolence. All such arrangements initiate centralized organization and lead ultimately to a central government for the church. When churches violate principles such as those here described, there is nothing to stop the church from having an earthly headquarters.

Terms for elders

“Overseers” is the word for “bishop” (ἐπισκοπος) – “...an overseer, a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly, any curator, guardian, or superintendent ... spec. the superintendent, head or overseer of any Christian church” – Thayer.

This shows that elders supervise the work of the local church. The Scriptures nowhere authorize the work of local churches to be supervised by a central headquarters, nor by the board of directors of a man-made society, nor by men who have the oversight of more than one local church. It is always by men within the framework of the local church.

This term also shows that elders have the right and responsibility to lead by making decisions which the church is responsible to follow. In that sense they “rule” in the church and the members are obligated to “obey” them (1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:7,17). This does not mean they

can choose for the church to do things God never authorized it to do. But in the realm of authorized work, there are many decisions that need to be made to carry out that work. These decisions should be made under the supervision of the elders. When the elders make such decisions, the flock is expected by God to obey them.

This also shows that “bishops” (“overseers”) is just an interchangeable term for “elders” (verse 17). The terms refer to the same men doing the same work. Compare Titus 1:5-7; 1 Peter 5:3.

“Shepherd the church” describes another aspect of the duties of elders. This word is the verb form of the word for “pastor” (ποιμην) “...a herdsman, esp. a shepherd; ... b. metaph, the presiding officer, manager, director, of any assembly; ... of the overseers of the Christian assemblies...” – Thayer. The word “pastor,” like the word “bishop,” is interchangeable with “elder,” and all the terms refer to the same work. So, a “pastor” is an elder, which is not the same work as an evangelist or preacher. Compare Ephesians 4:12.

Elders lead the local church like shepherds lead a flock. This involves the duty to make decisions and guard the safety of the sheep, as already described. It also involves providing spiritual nourishment as needed. The elders themselves are to be teachers, which is why one of their qualifications is to be “apt to teach.” They also supervise the appointment and work of other people who teach the members. This means the elders appoint times when the church should meet or specific groups of members should meet, so this work of being edified and built up can be accomplished. When the elders make such decisions, the members are obligated to cooperate.

Although the elders supervise the church, this does not mean the church belongs to them. Rather, the church was purchased by the blood of Jesus, so it belongs to Him. He built it (Matthew 16:18), died for it (Ephesians 5:22-25), and is the Head of it (Ephesians 1:22,23). Therefore, elders are not free to do as they please in their supervision of the church. They are stewards (Titus 1:5-7) and must use their authority to lead the church to do the will of Jesus the Head of the church. They must not make laws that differ from the New Testament, but just lead the church in carrying out the laws made by Jesus.

Since the church is purchased by Jesus’ blood, and since His blood saves men from their sins, it follows that all saved people are in the church. Those not in the church cannot be saved (compare Ephesians 5:23,25; Acts 2:47).

20:29,30 – Elders should guard for wolves who lead away the sheep, realizing they too may speak perverse things.

Next Paul specifically told the elders primarily what they should watch for. After Paul left, there would be savage wolves that would speak perverse things to draw away disciples. This refers clearly to false teachers who destroy the flock by leading the members into spiritual error.

Many passages elsewhere warn about the danger of false teachers, including Matthew 7:15-23 which also calls false teachers “wolves.” (See also Matthew 15:14; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 1 John 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:2-4; Titus 1:9-14; 2 John 9-11; Romans 16:17,18; Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Peter chapter 2.)

Note that this passage expressly predicts such error coming. Paul knew it would happen. Apostasy should not be unexpected. God’s people throughout history have gone astray repeatedly. We should not be surprised when it happens today. All of us, especially elders, should be on guard for the problem.

However, Paul says that even elders (“among yourselves”) would be false teachers. The very ones, who were supposed to guard the flock from wolves, could themselves become wolves and destroy the sheep. In the Old Testament, the shepherds God had appointed often led the people into error and had to be rebuked. This can happen also in the New Testament. Revelation 2:2,3 shows that Paul’s prediction came true and false teachers did arise in Ephesus, but the church successfully withstood them.

This clearly shows that elders do not have the right to lead the church to participate in unauthorized practices. It also shows that members must be on guard against elders. We cannot just blindly follow them (Matthew 15:13,14). If they lead us to error and we follow, we will be lost too. We cannot just blame them and expect God to excuse us.

20:31 – Paul had warned the church of this danger when he had been with them.

Paul again urged the elders to watch or be on guard (compare verse 28), especially reminding them of his own example. He had been there for three years, during which he had warned people night and day with tears. Faithfulness is of major importance and the danger is real and serious. We must continually be on guard. This is especially the duty of elders and preachers, but all must watch for false teaching, even as Paul did.

20:32 – He commended them to God and His word, which is able to give them an inheritance.

Paul began the concluding portion of his speech by commending these elders to the word of God’s grace. The Scriptures are the only infallible means that elders and others have to be sure they are right before God. Error is a great danger, but God has provided a means to remain faithful. God’s word can strengthen us and give us assurance of an eternal inheritance with other sanctified people. To be sanctified is to be set apart to God’s service. This is accomplished by our submission to God’s word. This then leads to the eternal inheritance in heaven (1 Peter 1:3,4).

This word is a message of God’s grace. None can be saved without grace (Ephesians 2:8-10). But God’s grace is revealed in God’s word. No

one can be saved without following the word, and no one can know what the grace of God will do except by the word. It is folly to speak of the grace of God saving someone except as we find evidence in the word of God that it will do so. Many people say, "I just think the grace of God will cover this or that." How do you know? What Scripture so teaches? The only way to know what the grace of God will or will not do is by finding it so stated in the word of God's grace.

20:33-35 – Paul had provided for his needs and taught them that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Paul's final point concerned proper attitude toward physical, material things. Paul had not been guilty of coveting the property of others. In fact, he had worked with his own hands to provide for himself and others, though this was not required of him and he could have expected the churches to provide for him (see notes on 18:3; compare 1 Thessalonians 2:9). Churches may Scripturally provide an income for preachers in payment for their work, but this does not justify greed (1 Corinthians 9:4-14; 2 Corinthians 11:7-9; Philippians 4:14-18; 1 Timothy 5:18; Luke 10:7).

Religious leaders often become greedy and too concerned about material wealth. Some have often become very wealthy. Many people are skeptical of religious teachers for this very reason. Many preachers are willing to teach whatever is popular so they can get a good income regardless of what God's word says. TV evangelists and others have thus made merchandise of innocent people and often poor people. Some leaders charge money to "heal" people, say "masses" for them, give them "indulgences" to get out of purgatory, etc. Other preachers have been known to beat their debts or even steal church funds. No wonder religion has a bad name among many people!

Paul's teaching about this imitated that of Jesus. He taught, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." This should be a basic attitude of Christians in all things, not just money. Many blessings are best kept by giving them away: joy, love, salvation, etc. We should realize that the truly happy person is the one who is able to do good for others, not one who is expecting others to do things for him. The selfish person, who seeks self-indulgence and self-pleasure, will not be truly happy in this life and will be lost in eternity. Those who seek to help others will find real meaning in life and will have eternal life.

None of the four accounts of Jesus' life records this statement by Jesus to my knowledge. Apparently this is one of the many things He taught which are not recorded by those men, yet Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit to know that He said it. Probably he had also heard it from people who knew Jesus personally.

20:36-38 – Paul then parted tearfully from the elders.

When Paul had finished his speech, he concluded with a prayer. This is an excellent example. It is always good to have prayer when we study together. It is especially good to have prayer as we leave one another and as we begin journeys, so God will care for us.

The whole group then wept freely, the elders falling on Paul's neck and kissing him. They were especially sorrowful for his assurances that they would see him no more. So, they accompanied him to the ship.

The accounts of Paul's suffering and teaching are so factual that sometimes we lose sight of the emotions that must be accompanied by such work. Here we are given a rare insight into the emotions of these leaders. Bible men are not robots with no feelings. They are human. They wept and rejoiced just as people do today. We are deeply moved by the picture of these aged men, who had been through so much in God's kingdom, weeping in their care for one another.

Crying and embracing are not unmanly acts. However, emotions must not determine what we believe and teach. That must be determined by God's will. Nor should emotions be artificially aroused by externals. The proper role of emotions is that they should follow naturally when we serve God (compare verses 19 and 31; compare Romans 12:15).

Christians should care for one another deeply. When we part, sorrow is not shameful. Nothing in the Scriptures requires us to be always smiling. The joy we have as Christians underlies all we do, but it does not eliminate sorrow and grief. Paul's parting was a time of sorrow and these men did not hide it.

Acts 21

21:1-16 - The Journey to Jerusalem

21:1,2 – Paul and his company sailed toward Phoenicia.

Paul's group (including Luke) set sail from Miletus. (It is not clear whether or not the other men, who were messengers of the churches, were still in the company. 20:4 says these accompanied Paul to Asia. Some, including Luke, left Troas before Paul and took him in at Assos – 20:13,14).

They sailed about 40 miles south to the island of Cos, then another 50 miles along the coast to the island of Rhodes. From there they sailed around the corner of the peninsula to the seacoast city of Patara (see **map**). There they found a ship to Phoenicia and sailed on it.

21:3,4 – They then sailed to Tyre and visited with disciples there.

The ship headed for Phoenicia sailed past Cyprus and on to Syria, where it landed at Tyre (see **map**). This was evidently a cargo ship intending at Tyre to unload the cargo.

At Tyre they found certain disciples and stayed there seven days. The disciples told Paul through the Holy Spirit not to go to Jerusalem. This was a similar message to what others had given (20:23).

Apparently, this was not an inspired command to stay away but simply a warning of danger if he went. McGarvey suggests that the Spirit gave only the **knowledge** of what would happen if Paul went. The advice to not go was the people's idea (compare verses 10-14).

21:5,6 – The disciples accompanied Paul to the shore.

When the time came for the group to leave, the whole group of disciples, with their wives and children, accompanied them till they got to the shore. There they all knelt and prayed together. They then separated, the disciples returning home, and Paul's group boarding the ship to continue the journey.

This description is brief, yet it shows the value of Christians praying together. Meeting with Christians to pray is not limited to a certain day of the week. Christians should want to participate when they have opportunity on days other than the first day of the week (the passage does not state what day it was, but this was clearly an exception meeting, not a regularly scheduled one). It is especially important to pray for those who are traveling and those who are facing dangers (as Paul was).

This also shows that Jesus' instruction to pray in the closet so as not to be seen of men (Matthew 6:5,6) does not forbid praying in public places. It forbids an attitude and motive of praying to receive praises from men. But if our motive is to sincerely please God, we ought not to refuse to pray simply because other people might observe us doing so.

This also illustrates the value of families being involved together in spiritual things. Serving God is not just for women and children while men do not need it. Nor are women and children excluded because God said the leadership belongs to the men. All should be involved. Especially it is the duty of parents to guide their children to participate and see the importance of spiritual things.

Sometimes parents excuse themselves from church or spiritual activities because they say they need to spend the time with their family. The proper approach is to do both at the same time: spend the time together with the family in doing spiritual activities!

We also are shown the importance of being hospitable and concerned for the well-being of our brethren who are traveling.

21:7,8 – Paul's company then traveled to Ptolemais and on to Caesarea, where they stayed with Philip the evangelist.

The ship left Tyre and sailed to Ptolemais, known as Acco in the Old Testament and today as Acre (see *map*). There the group again found some brethren, greeted them, and stayed a day. It is interesting to observe the number of places where churches of God's people existed though nothing has been said about them previously in the record.

The next day Paul's group left and traveled to Caesarea (whether by ship or land is not stated). There they found the house of Philip who was an evangelist and had been one of the seven appointed to minister to the widows in Acts 6. The group stayed with him in his home.

Philip is called an "evangelist" – one who preaches the gospel. This is the same Philip whose work of preaching in Samaria and to the Ethiopian treasurer was described in Acts 8. The fact that he was willing to be hospitable to Paul demonstrates the power of the gospel. As one of the seven in Acts 6, he would have been closely associated with Stephen, whom Paul had helped to stone to death. Yet here Philip opened his home to this former persecutor.

Acts 8:40 last spoke of him as being in Caesarea. In the present account we are again told that he is in Caesarea. Either he had remained there the whole time (which must have been a significant number of years) or, if he had gone elsewhere in the meanwhile, he had returned to Caesarea.

Furthermore, the passage says he had a house. Later we are told he had a family, including children. Contrary to the views of some, this shows that preachers do have the right to be settled in a certain area, remain there lengthy periods (or at least return to the same place), and be family men. They are not obligated to be continually traveling from

place to place, staying nowhere for very long, having no property or family obligations.

Note also that Philip used his house hospitably. Providing for traveling Christians, especially preachers, is an admirable example of hospitality, especially in countries where lodging was difficult.

21:9 – Philip’s four daughters were prophetesses.

We are told that Philip’s family included four virgin daughters who evidently were very spiritually minded. This speaks well of Philip as a father as well as a preacher. We ought to seek to train our children to know God’s ways even as we do our duty to teach the word to those outside our families. Not all preachers emphasize teaching their families as they ought, and often they have family problems as a result.

These daughters had the gift of prophecy. This is the power to speak by the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit. Obviously, the gift was available to women as well as men; in fact, it had been so promised (Acts 2:17).

The role of women as teachers is limited in that they are not to teach authoritatively over men, nor are they to address the church when it is assembled as a whole congregation (1 Corinthians 14:34,35; 1 Timothy 2:11,12). It follows that passages such as this one should never be used to justify women preaching in church meetings or leading a Bible study with men present. However, such passages clearly do show that women have an important role in teaching provided they do so in a way that respects the God-given limitations (see notes on 18:26).

21:10,11 – Agabus prophesied Paul’s capture in Jerusalem.

The group remained in Caesarea many days. Why they did so, and exactly how long they stayed, is not revealed. However, they still sought to get to Jerusalem for Pentecost (20:16). Perhaps they were now close enough and would be traveling by land so they knew how long it would take, need not fear complications due to poor sailing weather, and did not have to suit their travel schedule to the schedule of the ships.

During this time, a prophet named Agabus came from Judea. He had earlier prophesied the famine in Judea (11:28). He took Paul’s belt, used it to bind his own hands and feet, and predicted that the owner of the belt (Paul) would be likewise bound by the Jews at Jerusalem and delivered into the hands of Gentiles. This was an express prediction from the Holy Spirit.

This added to the predictions mentioned earlier about the fate awaiting Paul (see 20:23; 21:4). This is the most specific of the recorded predictions, and of course it was eventually fulfilled exactly.

Here we see an excellent example of the use of visual aids in preaching. Some people doubt the use of visuals in modern preaching, yet in fact preachers in the Bible commonly used visual aids and often did so even more effectively than do modern preachers. Bible preachers often

used physical objects to illustrate their points. Who could miss the lesson when it had been so graphically illustrated?

21:12-14 – Paul determined to continue despite the pleas of the disciples.

Hearing the prediction of what awaited Paul, all the brethren present pleaded with him not to go to Jerusalem. Note that even Paul's travel companions opposed his determination to go on.

Paul, however, was determined to continue on. He said he was ready to die as well as be bound. He urged them to cease weeping for him because it was breaking his heart. Their conduct was adding to the burden and making the problems even more difficult for him.

The others saw that he would not change his mind, so they ceased trying and resigned themselves to accept whatever the Lord's will might be in the matter.

See notes on 20:23 and 21:4 about this. I do not know why Paul was so determined to continue under the circumstances. Clearly, he was very courageous and devoted to the Lord's cause, but why endanger his life unnecessarily? Apparently, he considered the matter to be very important.

He was helping to deliver the funds collected by the churches for the needy saints in Jerusalem (Acts 24:17). It would seem that other men could have been completed that task without him if it was a matter of life or death. But other passages indicate that Paul viewed this gift, not just as a way to meet physical needs, but as a way of cementing the relationship between the Gentile Christians who sent the gift with the Jewish Christians who received it. Perhaps he was determined to make sure that all involved understood this message. In any case, it is clear that there was no sin in his continuing on.

21:15,16 – From Caesarea they continued their journey to Jerusalem and lodged with Mnason.

After a period of some days, they packed and completed their journey to Jerusalem. Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied them. Included was a man from Cyprus named Mnason. He had been a disciple from early days, and they were to lodge in his house. Note again that Christians did at times own houses and used them quite hospitably especially to lodge traveling preachers.

It is interesting the little details that are often omitted from stories yet are sometimes included. We would expect that the travelers had luggage or baggage (see ASV), and here we are told this was the case.

This was the end of Paul's third preaching trip. From this point, as far as the record in Acts shows, he traveled only as a prisoner.

Paul's Arrest and Imprisonment in Judea – 21:17-23:35

21:17-40 - The Arrest in the Temple

21:17-26 – Paul purified in the temple

21:17-19 – Paul met with and reported to the elders of the Jerusalem church.

When the group arrived at Jerusalem, the brethren there greeted them gladly. We are not here told of the delivering of the gifts from the churches for the needy saints, though other passages explain that this was a main purpose of this trip (compare 24:17; Romans 15:25-28; see notes on 20:3,4).

On the next day, Paul had a meeting with James and the elders of the church. This is surely the same James who had a significant role in the meeting to discuss circumcision in Acts 15 (see notes there). Clearly he was a very influential man in that church, as also is confirmed in Galatians 2:9. Note again the existence of elders in this church.

Paul explained in detail the work that God had done through him among the Gentiles. This process of reporting his work has been repeated at various times, both at Jerusalem and at Antioch (compare 15:3,4; 14:27). Clearly, Christians in those days were interested in the spread of the gospel elsewhere, and we should be likewise. And note that the work of preaching to Gentiles was of special interest to these Jewish Christians.

21:20,21 – Jewish brethren believed that Paul taught people not to be circumcised or keep the customs.

James and the elders rejoiced in the work among the Gentiles. However, they made a suggestion that they hoped would help smooth the antagonism and opposition of the Jews. Many Jews believed in the gospel, but were still zealous for the law. They had heard that Paul was teaching Jews, who lived in Gentile areas, that they should forsake Moses' law, should not circumcise their children, and should not walk according to the customs (of the law).

This apparently upset some Jewish Christians, so these leaders in the church sought to eliminate this opposition and potential division. Paul had hoped that the gift he brought from Gentile churches might remove some of this prejudice some Christians still had against him. This opposition went back at least as far as the discussion of chapter 15. Several of Paul's letters had discussed at length the issue of the Old Testament law and the attitude some Jewish Christians had toward Paul. Evidently, this was a serious antagonism, so the leaders had a suggestion that might help Paul overcome it.

Note that the references to the law here do not mean that the elders approved of the Jewish concept of binding the law as necessary to salvation. Paul would never have agreed to encourage that. Rather, they still kept it as national law and family tradition. But they had been falsely informed that Paul was teaching Jews who lived in Gentile areas that they must cease even such practices. This was false in that, though Paul had taught that the law was no longer binding, nevertheless many aspects of it could be kept as national law or civil traditions. This would include circumcision – Paul said it did not matter one way or another, so long as it was not bound as necessary. It would also include rules regarding eating unclean meats (compare Romans 14). Doubtless, many other such Mosaic practices could be continued as civil law or tradition. Paul himself observed such acts when among Jews (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

21:22-24 – The elders urged Paul to participate in purification from a vow.

The men had a plan to defuse this opposition. They knew the people would hear Paul had come and the assembly (of the church) would meet. So, they suggested anticipating the problem and taking steps to eliminate it before it even came up.

They had four men who had vows. The idea was for Paul to be purified with them and pay their expenses so they could complete their purification rites and shave their heads. Then everyone would know that Paul was not telling people it was wrong to keep the customs, but he himself walked orderly, keeping the law. In short, he was to have fellowship with them and join in this activity according to the law, so people would know about it.

21:25 – But the elders acknowledged that the Gentile converts did not need to keep the law.

James and the elders did not see this as contradicting what had been decided in Acts 15. Gentiles were still not to be required to keep the law. The decision would stand that they were to observe only the necessary things, and this list is repeated exactly as in Acts 15:20,29 (see notes there).

21:26 – Paul agreed to this plan and, on the next day, he was purified with the four men.

This involved entering the temple to announce the end of the days of purification. At that time an offering was made for each of the men.

We will see that the plan backfired in the sense that it turned out not to matter much what the Jewish Christians thought. The plan became an opportunity for unbelieving Jews to arrest Paul, start a riot, and lead to his imprisonment. So the idea was a colossal failure.

However, we must ask several questions. Exactly what was it that Paul did? Why did he agree to go along with it? Was this right or wrong

for him to do? How can his action be harmonized with his other teaching about the old law in Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews? Could it be that he sinned in this matter and was himself inconsistent?

What was involved in this vow and the purification rites?

There appears to be no doubt that this refers to the Mosaic practice of the Nazarite vow as described in Numbers 6. I can find no other vow that fits. The Nazarite vow involved shaving the head and offering sacrifices as described here.

This was a voluntary vow that one undertook for a temporary period of time. It required the individual to neither eat nor drink anything made from grapes. Also, the man could not cut his hair for the period of the vow. At the end of the vow, he shaved his head and the hair was burned along with various offerings to God, including sin offerings. See Numbers 6 for details.

I see no alternative but to conclude that these men made such a vow and Paul agreed to participate with them in the various ceremonies that concluded their vow, including the animal sacrifices.

The only problem with the idea that this was a Nazarite vow is that keeping such a vow would hinder Christians from partaking of the fruit of the vine in the Lord's Supper. Stringer suggests that the men may have stipulated this as an exception to their vow. Or perhaps, because the fruit of the vine was consecrated for required spiritual service, it may have been considered a permitted exception.

Does this harmonize with what Paul taught elsewhere about the law?

Paul unquestionably taught that the Old Testament is not binding as law (Hebrews 10:1-10; 7:11-14; 8:6-13; 9:1-4; 2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Galatians 3:24,25; 5:1-6; Romans 7:1-7; Ephesians 2:11-16; Colossians 2:13-17). However, he also practiced parts of the law as custom or civil law as long as they were not bound on others. He had Timothy circumcised (see notes on Acts 16:3). As discussed earlier, he taught that people could refuse to eat unclean meats as long as they did not bind this on others (Romans 14). And when we was around Jews, he himself practiced aspects of the law (without considering them to be binding), if this would help him have opportunity to teach them (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

Nevertheless, what Paul did here is extremely difficult to explain in light of his own teaching about the Old Law. Other commentators generally agree this is a very difficult point. McGarvey says it is one of the most difficult points in the book. There seem to be three main explanations:

(1) Paul observed these matters merely as custom and civil law. Of course, he did not consider them binding religiously. Since the Mosaic Law was still in effect as civil law in Judea, he followed the law and customs, like we today practice laws and customs that we do not consider to

be religious, even if other people do practice them religiously. (See Harkrider and others.)

So, this view says Paul did only what harmonizes with 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. I could accept that one might take a vow and refuse to eat or drink grape products. I would have some difficulty with the refusal to cut hair in light of 1 Corinthians 11:14.

But the major problem with this view is the animal sacrifices. Of the commentators who argue that Paul did this as a matter of custom, almost none of them deal with the sacrifices. The passage clearly says the sacrifices were offered (21:26). I might manage to see how one could justify offering drink offerings or thank offerings. But Numbers 6:13-21 clearly shows that the sacrifices were required to include **sin** offerings. How could one do this without belittling the sacrifice of Jesus (see the book of Hebrews)?

(2) McGarvey argues that Paul acted in harmony with the revelation he had received to that point. He had written Galatians and Romans, showing the Old Law is not binding. But perhaps the further revelation regarding the proper relationship between animal sacrifices and Jesus' sacrifice had not yet been given. Perhaps God was gradually revealing the proper relationship of Jews to the Old Law.

Remember, that the law had been from God and Jews had worshiped God under it with His approval. Perhaps He did not require an immediate and full break with the law from those who had been subject to it. Perhaps He allowed a sort of transition period for the Jews to give up the old law. However, He eventually had the temple destroyed so animal sacrifices ceased in AD 70, thereby ending that system of worship once and for all. After that, perhaps no Christian would be allowed to return to that practice.

(3) A third possibility is that Paul sinned. Peter in Galatians 2:11ff had been overcome by the pressures of the Judaizers and had done what he knew should not be done. Perhaps to please the leaders of the church in Jerusalem and to work for peace, Paul erred in judgment. Though he did not do this as a matter **binding** on Gentiles or Jews, yet perhaps he did it is an acceptable custom when in reality He should not have done so.

But why did God not reveal that Paul sinned, if he had? Why was Paul not rebuked? The passage does not say God approved. It was the church leaders that advised it. There was no revelation from God and no miracle to confirm the conclusion, as discussed regarding the conclusions reached in Acts 15. But still it seems we would be told if it was sinful.

All in all, I find none of the above alternatives fully satisfying, but I have nothing better to offer. The second alternative seems the least troublesome. I conclude that, whether or not Paul sinned in offering the animal sacrifices, such an act **would be sinful** for anyone to do since the

fullness of the gospel has been revealed. Of course, the issue is irrelevant in that no one **could** offer such sacrifices today, since the temple was destroyed in 70 AD and since no genealogy exists to establish authorized priests as descendants of Aaron.

21:27-40 – Paul’s arrest by the Jews

21:27-29 – Asian Jews captured Paul and accused him of teaching against the law and bringing Gentiles into the temple.

Regardless of intent, Paul’s participation in the temple activities led to severe consequences. Near the end of the period for the purification of the men, certain Jews from Asia (obviously unbelieving Jews) stirred up a mob and captured Paul. They saw him in the temple and claimed he had brought Greeks (Gentiles) into the temple and defiled it. They had seen him earlier with Trophimus an Ephesian and they supposed Paul had brought him into the temple. They accused him of teaching everywhere against the people, against the law, and against the temple. (Compare 6:13,14 and the accusations against Stephen – see notes there. See also 18:13.)

Much of this was fabrication. They had no proof Paul had defiled the temple. His whole intent had been to appease the Jews as much as possible and defuse Jewish opposition by showing that he kept the customs and respected his Jewish background.

As discussed in other such instances, Paul did teach that the law had been removed, but this was not a violation of the law. It was a fulfillment of it as prophesied in the law itself. He did not seek to harm the people but to help them by showing them the fulfillment of their prophecies and the greater blessings they could have in Christ.

Interestingly, the men who made these charges were Jews from Asia, the very region Paul had just come from, where he had faced persecution (Acts 19). Paul had a reputation throughout a broad area. As a result, persecution followed him no matter where he went. Presumably, these men were in Jerusalem for the feast.

People today have changed little. If they oppose truth, they will not respond favorably to efforts to appease them even in matters where common ground may Scripturally be found. Motives will be misinterpreted, malicious intent will be assumed, even when things are done that they have no real reason to oppose. Some people will not be peaceable no matter how peaceably they are treated. They have their minds made up and nothing will reach them.

21:30-32 – The commander of the garrison rescued Paul.

A major riot was in the process of developing. The disturbance reached people throughout the city. A crowd gathered, Paul was dragged from the temple, and the doors were shut. The people were preparing to kill Paul and were in the process of beating him.

The soldier in charge of the Roman garrison, however, heard of the uproar in the city. No doubt the Romans were especially vigilant for trouble during feasts such as this where people gathered from around the world. Jews were known to be rebellious and independent.

The commander gathered soldiers and centurions (captains of 100 soldiers), and ran down into the crowd. Since there was more than one centurion, each presumably with his hundred soldiers, this was a sizable force. The people stopped beating Paul when they saw the soldiers.

21:33-36 – The commander sought the people to explain their treatment of Paul.

The commander took Paul and bound him with two chains. He asked the people what their accusation was against Paul, but the responses were so confused that he could not determine what the problem was. So, he took Paul into custody and attempted to leave with him.

However, as they left, the soldiers had to physically carry Paul in order to protect him from the violence of the mob, who followed them crying out that Paul should be done away with (killed).

21:37-40 – Paul sought opportunity to address the mob.

Seeing he was physically protected from the mob, Paul, as he often did, determined to use this as an opportunity to teach. So, he asked to speak to the commander.

The commander, knowing nothing of the situation, thought Paul may have been an Egyptian who had, apparently, led a rebellion of four thousand men into the wilderness. He was surprised Paul could speak to him in Greek.

Paul responded that he was a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia. This was a noted city and he was a citizen there. This showed he was not the Egyptian but was one for whom the Roman government should have some respect. Based on that, he asked permission to speak to the crowd.

Permission was granted, so Paul stood on the stairs and spoke to the people in Hebrew. The people finally became silenced as they sought to hear what he had to say.

Consider the love and courage it would take to use this opportunity. Paul had been beaten with intent to kill him. He had escaped with his life, yet he wanted to teach and convert his attackers!

The speech is recorded in the next chapter.

Acts 22

22:1-30 - Paul's Defense to the Jewish Mob

22:1,2 – Paul addressed the crowd in Hebrew.

The Jews had captured Paul and created a riot claiming he taught against the law and the temple, and that he had defiled the temple by bringing a Greek into it (21:27,28). Paul had been rescued by the Roman soldiers, and had asked permission to address the mob. This chapter contains the defense he offered.

Note that Paul did not believe in compromise for the sake of peace. He did not tell these Jews that he had no differences with them or that he considered them faithful to God. Nor did he offer a defense for his own self-interest so he could be released. Instead, he used the opportunity to defend the gospel and convert his persecutors! Paul believed in publicly debating religious issues, speaking the truth in love, even if people became angry as a result! Though they sought to kill him, he sought to save them.

Nevertheless, these verses note two things Paul did to help the audience see that he did respect them and the law. He had not rejected or rebelled against his Jewish heritage, as they thought he had done. The first thing he did was to refer to them as brethren and fathers. This showed that he still viewed himself as a Jew by nationality. They were his kinsmen. He did not seek to alienate them, nor had he turned his back on his nation. Rather, he had learned the fulfillment of all that his Jewish heritage had prepared him for. He hoped they too could come to learn it.

Second, Paul addressed them in the Hebrew language, not in Greek as he had addressed the captain (21:37). This made them more interested as he addressed them in their own language, so they listened more quietly.

Note here the advantage of speaking God's word in the native language of the learners. Paul no doubt knew both Greek and Hebrew from his educational background, and most of the hearers probably would have understood him either way. However, sometimes speaking in a native language has the advantages of being better understood and showing respect for the hearers. Sometimes this benefit was accomplished by miracles of tongues as in Acts 2, but in this case Paul doubtless knew both languages from common use. This example demonstrates the im-

portance today of having Bibles translated into the language of the people we teach and to address them in their language or have an interpreter.

22:3 – Paul began by telling about his past training and zeal in the Jewish religion.

Paul intended to tell about his conversion. Some people today tell their “conversion experience” to motivate others to “be converted.” Paul’s example here should not be used to teach us to convert others by telling our conversion stories. His conversion was unique in that he saw Jesus and could personally testify that Jesus has been raised from the dead. This was the purpose of his testimony.’

Paul was a Jew by natural birth. He was born in Tarsus of Cilicia but trained in Jerusalem (“this city”) at the feet of the highly respected Jewish teacher named Gamaliel (see Acts 5). He was well instructed in the strict manner of the law of the fathers – i.e., the Law of Moses (and perhaps also Jewish tradition). His conversion to the gospel, then, was not a matter of ignorance of the Law.

Note that it helps in convincing people if they can realize that we understand their position and have no reason to be biased against it. If we have experienced their views or read their books – or especially if we once held their views – then they know we can understand and even sympathize with what they are facing. It also helps us understand what to say to convince them to change, because we know what convinced us.

Paul had been taught strictly in the law. He often emphasized that he had been a Pharisee, the group that was known for strict obedience. Paul did not change because he was “liberal” minded and never really knew or accepted the law.

Further, Paul had been zealous for the law. He had not been an indifferent, negligent Jew who was converted because he never really had been committed. He was so zealous he persecuted Christians.

He also granted that the Jews in the audience were zealous for the Law. Their zeal had led them to oppose him. He could identify with their zeal because he himself had possessed it and had persecuted Christians, even as these Jews were here persecuting him. Note that he was discussing things that interested them. This helped hold their interest and gave them reason to seriously consider what he had to say.

Note also that religious zeal is not enough to save or guarantee eternal life. These people were zealous religious people, but they were not pleasing to God and still needed to be saved (compare Romans 10:1-3).

22:4,5 – Paul had persecuted Christians, even traveling to Damascus to capture them.

Paul illustrated his zeal and former conviction by explaining that he had persecuted the followers of Jesus to the point of imprisoning men and women and bringing about their deaths. He had evidence that he

had been zealously committed and could understand their views. Surely, no one would act as he had unless they really were committed.

Even the high priest could testify of Paul's zeal, as could the whole Sanhedrin council, for they had authorized the work he had done by giving him letters of authority to carry out his persecutions. By their authority he had gone to Damascus to capture Christians there and bring them back to Jerusalem to be punished.

Paul was obviously leading to Jesus' appearance to him and the conversion that resulted. See notes on Acts 9 and Acts 26 for further details.

22:6-8 – Paul then described Jesus' appearance to him.

As Paul traveled, he came near Damascus about noon. Yet bright as the noon sun would be, he saw another light so bright it was clearly noticeable even at noon. In fact, it blinded him, as the record will show.

He fell to the ground and heard a voice asking why Saul was persecuting him. Paul addressed the speaker as "Lord," and asked who was speaking to him. The voice said it was Jesus of Nazareth, the one whom Paul had been persecuting. See notes on Acts 9 for further details.

22:9,10 – Paul asked what to do and was told to go into Damascus where he would be told what to do.

Other people were traveling with Paul, and they saw the light and were frightened by it, but they did not hear the voice of the one who spoke to him. This means they did not understand the message. As explained in 9:7, they did hear a sound (see notes there). These men could serve as witnesses that the event in question occurred. While they did not understand what was said, they could testify to the light, the sound, and the fact Paul was struck blind (for they led him into the city).

Saul was convinced by this appearance of Jesus that he needed to consider major changes in his views. He asked what the Lord wanted him to do. Note that at this point he knew he was addressing Jesus, yet he still called Him "Lord." The only reasonable explanation for this is that he had accepted as true, not just that Jesus was alive and was the One speaking to him, but that in fact He is the Master whom He claimed to be. Prior to this, Paul had believed Jesus was a fraud and charlatan.

Jesus told him to go into Damascus and there he would be told all things appointed for him to do. Note again that Jesus Himself said there are things people must **do** to be forgiven of sins. It is not just a matter of what people believe. Had a denominational preacher been speaking to Saul, he would have said there was nothing to do, just believe! See notes on Acts 9.

Paul was not just relating an interesting story. He was giving **evidence** for his change of conviction. This is eyewitness testimony that Jesus was really alive and therefore had been raised from the dead. This not only explained why Paul changed his beliefs, but it ought also to have caused the hearers to realize they needed to change.

Paul was here doing what he had been called to do as an apostle. He was giving his eyewitness testimony that Jesus had been raised from the dead. How else could one explain the change in Paul? This was Paul's own explanation. As an eyewitness he gave his testimony and used it to explain the change in his life. What right do skeptics have denying it unless they can **prove** otherwise? The conversion of Saul is today convincing proof Jesus was raised from the dead, just like it was then.

22:11 – Paul was blinded by the light, so had to be led by the hand into Damascus.

The fact Paul was blinded was significant. It was a sign to him and to those who were with him that the event really had happened. There could be no doubt of that since he could not see. The fact Ananias was able to heal Saul was also a sign that he was the one sent by God to tell Saul what to do. The fact Saul was blind and then healed was also a sign to Ananias that Saul had seen Jesus, since this is the explanation given to Ananias by the Lord. See Acts 9 for further notes.

22:12,13 – In Damascus Saul was visited by a man named Ananias through whom Saul's sight was restored.

This occurred three days after Saul entered Damascus. During those three days, Saul had been praying and fasting, showing his repentance. Ananias was obviously the man sent by God to tell Saul what he must do. He is described as a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony of the Jews. Obviously, he had been converted and was a Christian (9:10 says he was a disciple), yet he had been zealous according to the law, and Jews respected him. Paul was not converted by some radical anti-Jew.

Ananias stood by Saul and told him to receive his sight. It was restored that same hour. This constituted miraculous confirmation that Ananias was from God, so Saul would know Ananias was the one sent from God to tell him what to do.

Note again that Jesus did not tell Saul how to be saved, but sent a messenger to give him the inspired word.

Some claim that the fact Ananias addressed Saul as "brother Saul" proves that Saul had already been forgiven. However, Saul had not yet been told how to be saved, and verse 16 shows clearly that Saul's sins had not yet been washed away. "Brother" was simply a common salutation among Jews. Paul had addressed his persecutors as "brethren" in verse 1. Does that mean they were Christians too? (Compare verse 5; 23:5.)

22:14,15 – Ananias explained that Paul had been chosen to be a witness of the things he had seen and heard.

God had chosen Paul, not only to know God's will, but also to see Jesus (the Just One) and to hear the voice of His mouth. Note that Saul not only heard Jesus but he **saw** him.

The purpose of this was to qualify Paul to be a *witness* to others of what he had seen and heard. This qualified Saul to serve as an apostle, since all apostles had to be able to testify that they had seen Jesus alive from the dead (compare 1:21; 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:4-8). That he would testify to all men shows that he would teach Gentiles, not just Jews.

Note that Ananias was clearly inspired by God and did miracles to confirm his inspiration. This constitutes his inspired testimony that the Lord had told him that Saul had seen Jesus. Further Ananias testified that God had chosen Saul to be an eyewitness. This was also necessary for one to be an apostle.

22:16 – Ananias told Saul to be baptized and wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

Jesus had said that Saul should go into Damascus to be told what he must do. Verse 16 records the only thing that Saul was told to do: be baptized and wash away his sins, calling on the Lord's name.

It is clear that Saul believed in Jesus when he saw him on the road to Damascus. He had clearly repented, for he was willing to do what the Lord said to do. For one who had been persecuting Jesus' followers, this was obviously a major turnabout. Saul had even been praying in Damascus, though no one had told him to do so (9:11). According to nearly all modern Protestant denominations, Saul had already done everything he needed to do to be saved. If they have the truth, then Saul's sins should all have been forgiven before Ananias ever got there.

But Ananias came to tell Saul what he must do, and what he told him clearly proved that his sins had not yet been forgiven. He still had his sins and needed to have them washed away. What was necessary yet to achieve this? He had to be baptized. Clearly, sins are forgiven as a result of baptism, not before it or without it. See Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21.

Note further that, for one who has never been baptized and needs to receive forgiveness of sins, the gospel clearly teaches that he "calls on the name of the Lord" to receive this salvation by being baptized, not by prayer (compare 2:21,38). This expression simply means one should appeal to Jesus' authority. This is done by whatever means He has authorized.

There is no passage anywhere that teaches an unbaptized person to pray for God to forgive his sins. Always such people were told to be baptized. Yet, many denominations today tell alien sinners that baptism is not necessary to salvation, but instead they tell them to "pray the sinner's prayer."

Another lesson taught here is that, when people are in sin and have come to believe in Jesus and repent, they should not postpone baptism. In every Bible example, such people were baptized as soon as it could be done (the same day, same hour, etc.). Yet, when people want to be bap-

tized today, many denominations tell them to wait till an upcoming baptismal service days or weeks in the future. This is obviously because they do not believe the proper purpose of baptism. They think people are saved without baptism. The urgency of baptism in the gospel shows that it is essential to salvation. All who are “waiting” to be baptized need to be told what Saul was told. Instead of waiting, they should get up and be baptized!

In 1 Timothy 1:12-16 Paul explained that, if God could save one who was guilty of such terrible sins as he had been, then God must be able and willing to save anyone. His example has lessons for all of us. If we want salvation, we must believe that we can receive it, and we must obey the same pattern. Have you done so?

22:17,18 – Jesus warned Paul to leave Jerusalem.

Later Paul went to Jerusalem (see 9:26-30). There he was praying in the temple and the Lord spoke to him in a trance. He told Saul that the people would not receive his testimony, so he should quickly leave Jerusalem. Persecution began almost immediately after Saul’s conversion.

22:19,20 – Paul thought people would listen to him because of his background.

Saul pointed out to the Lord that the people knew what kind of man he had been. They knew he had persecuted Christians, imprisoning and beating them. He had even consented to the death of Stephen, holding the clothes of those who stoned him (see 7:58,59). Though Saul had been forgiven of his sins, yet he obviously remembered and deeply regretted his past evils. Note that consenting and cooperating with a sin makes a person guilty of the sin, even if he himself does not personally commit it.

It appeared that Saul thought the people should surely listen to him because he had proved himself a faithful Jew. Yet he had changed, so they should consider why he had changed. No doubt he was correct that this is what the people ***should*** have done, but the Lord had told him what they ***would*** do. People in sin often become especially infuriated when someone has irrefutable proof they are wrong and have themselves changed from their position.

22:21 – Jesus said He would send Paul to teach Gentiles.

Despite what Saul thought the people should do, Jesus affirmed that the people would not listen, so Saul must leave and preach to the Gentiles. As we have studied Paul’s teaching, we have observed this pattern in every city where he preached. He would first try to reach Jews, but when they rejected the message he would go to Gentiles. His travels had sent him “far” from Jerusalem throughout the Roman Empire. He became known, in a sense, as an apostle to the Gentiles

Paul's statement here explained to the Jews why he had been teaching Gentiles and associating with them. It was not because he disrespected the temple or had turned his back on his people. Rather the Jews had persecuted him, so he had taught the Gentiles as a matter of Divine revelation.

22:22 – The mob called for Paul's death.

Paul had given the mob convincing evidence that Jesus was truly sent from God, and that Paul had good reason to follow Jesus' teaching and to teach Gentiles. The mob, however, became violently angry. They were especially upset because he said he would go to the Gentiles. To a Jew, Gentiles were not fit to associate with and surely could not be considered among God's people. The initial complaint against Paul had been that he had defiled the temple by taking in a Gentile (21:28,29).

They viewed Paul as guilty of a capital crime and said he was no longer fit to live. Paul had not convinced them, but he had at least given them the opportunity to hear the gospel. They could blame no one but themselves that they had rejected it.

22:23,24 – The commander decided to scourge Paul to find out what upset the people.

So upset were the people that they shouted out, tore off their clothes (outer garments), and threw dust into the air. These were all expressions of anger or great emotion. Here they clearly characterized a mob riot.

The chief commander, who had rescued Paul with his soldiers, determined to take Paul into the barracks or castle and scourge him so get a confession from him regarding what had so upset the people. Scourging involved beating a person with a whip consisting of small cords, sometimes with bits of bone or metal in the cords. Jesus had been so scourged before His crucifixion.

Clearly, the commander had no understanding of the religious motivations of the Jews. He could not believe they were so upset unless there was some criminal activity involved. He determined to scourge Paul to make him confess what he had done wrong.

22:25 – Paul asked if it was lawful for them to scourge an uncondemned Roman.

As the soldiers were binding Paul in preparation to scourge him, he spoke to the centurion (captain of 100 men) who was standing by. He asked if it was lawful to scourge a man who was a Roman citizen and had not been given a formal trial in which he had been condemned or proved guilty of a crime. Paul knew, of course, that this was illegal. This was simply his way of informing the soldier that he was a Roman and that he knew his rights.

The Romans had subjugated many nations. It was legal for them, according to their law, to whip the citizens of those countries to get con-

fessions. But they could not so scourge or even bind one who was a Roman citizen (verse 29) until he had first been convicted of a crime. Any Roman soldier who so mistreated a Roman citizen was himself subject to severe penalties.

Here again Paul was using his rights as a Roman citizen for his own protection and ultimately for the furtherance of the gospel. We may and should likewise use our rights in our nation.

22:26-28 – Paul confirmed to the commander that he had been born a Roman citizen.

Having heard Paul's affirmation, the centurion went to the commander and reported what Paul had said. He warned the commander that Paul was a Roman. Having heard this, the commander came and asked Paul directly if he was a Roman. Paul affirmed that he was.

The commander responded that he had purchased his citizenship at a great price (perhaps by bribery). Perhaps he thought this was how Paul had become a citizen. The comment may have been intended to see what Paul knew about citizenship and even to determine whether he was genuinely a citizen. Paul responded that he was a citizen by birth. He was automatically born a Roman citizen because his parents had been citizens.

Jews frequently were not Romans, so the commander had apparently assumed Paul was not. However, Paul was both a Jew and a Roman. He was willing to use this advantage for good. Note that all Paul had to do was to claim citizenship. Apparently, the commander demanded no proof of citizenship except for an affirmation. Making a false claim of citizenship was of itself a severe crime (Stringer claims it was punishable by death) so much so that apparently the commander just accepted Paul's claim.

22:29,30 – The commander then ceased examining Paul but attempted to find out from the Jews why they were upset with Paul.

The commander then had no choice but to stop the proceedings he had ordered. Those who were about to examine Paul by scourging were required to withdraw. Further, the commander himself now became afraid of the prisoner, instead of the other way around. He had bound Paul and almost beaten him. This could lead to severe penalties if it became known. Paul then had, in effect, a certain influence over the commander because he surely did not want Paul to tell the higher authorities what had happened. The commander appears to have been a conscientious leader, but his proper treatment of Paul would also have been motivated by his knowledge that Paul could have gotten him in serious trouble. (Other passages show that Paul remain bound in chains for many years, though he had not been convicted of a crime. Apparently it was

proper to so bind a Roman prisoner to prevent his escape, but not to bind him in such a way as to attempt to beat a confession from him.)

The commander nevertheless needed to handle Paul's case in some way, so the next day he called the chief priests and the council (Sanhedrin) to come and state their accusations against Paul. He brought Paul into their midst. This set the stage for the next confrontation with the Jews, as recorded in the next chapter.

Acts 23

23:1-23:10 - Paul's Appearance before the Council

23:1 – Paul claimed he had lived in all good conscience.

The Roman commander brought Paul before the Jewish council so he could understand the nature of the charges against him (22:30). Paul began his speech by claiming he had lived in all good conscience throughout his life.

“Conscience” (συνειδησις) – “...a. the consciousness of anything ... b. the soul as distinguishing between what is morally good and bad, prompting to do the former and shun the latter, commending the one, condemning the other; conscience...” – Thayer.

So, conscience is that faculty of mind by which one knows within himself whether or not he is doing what he believes to be right. When he does what he believes he ought to do, his conscience approves. When he does what he believes to be wrong, his conscience disapproves.

Paul spoke in defense of his present conduct. He affirmed that he knew nothing worthy of being imprisoned. He was, in effect, pleading “not guilty.”

Yet it is interesting that he affirmed this for his whole life, including his days as a Jew before his conversion. In 26:9 he claimed that he had persecuted the church believing that was what he really ought to do. As a Jew he did not believe Jesus was God's son. He persecuted Christians not realizing he was in error, so his conscience did not bother him. Nevertheless, according to God's word he was in error and later realized he had been the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:12-16).

It is possible to act in all good conscience and yet be wrong because our beliefs are wrong. People often say, “Just let your conscience be your guide.” Now, we should not violate our conscience by doing what we know to be wrong. But one can follow his conscience and still be wrong because his beliefs are wrong to begin with.

Conscience simply tells us whether or not we are doing what we **believe** to be right. If our beliefs are wrong, our conscience may feel fine, yet we are still in error. First, we must train our consciences according to God's word. Then if we follow our consciences we will truly be right.

23:2,3 – Paul rebuked the high priest for commanding that he be struck on the mouth.

In response to Paul's claim that he was innocent, Ananias the high priest commanded the people beside Paul to slap his mouth. This was

surely an unjust act, inasmuch as Paul had not been proved to have done wrong. Why slap someone just because he affirms he is innocent? Maybe he is innocent! To punish him simply for claiming innocence is to demonstrate that the court trying Paul was seriously biased. They expected maybe that he would claim to be guilty?

Paul responded by rebuking this act. He pointed out that the men were supposed to be judging him according to the law, yet this man had commanded an act that violated the law. Paul called him a “whited wall,” an expression for a hypocrite who appears beautiful on the outside but is different on the inside (compare Matthew 23:27). This was an apt description.

Paul claimed that God would smite this man for what he had done.

23:4,5 – Paul apologized for his statement, claiming that he did not know it was the high priest.

A bystander pointed out that Paul was speaking improperly to the high priest. Paul then withdrew his statement saying he did not know he was addressing the high priest. He quoted a Scripture saying one should not speak evil of a ruler of the people (Exodus 22:28). This is a confusing event. Several problems present themselves:

(1) Why did Paul not know the man was the high priest? Coffman suggests that perhaps, since the Romans had arranged the meeting, the high priest was not sitting in a place that indicated his position, so Paul did not recognize who he was. Another alternative may be that two men were recognized as high priest at the time (such as Annas and Caiaphas had been in Jesus’ time). Maybe Paul realized another man was high priest but not this one too.

(2) Wherein did Paul do wrong here? Many examples show prophets powerfully rebuking rulers of the people. John the Baptist had told Herod he had no right to have his brother’s wife (Matthew 14:4). Nathan rebuked David for his sin (2 Samuel 11,12). Samuel rebuked Saul (1 Samuel 15). Elijah rebuked Ahab (1 Kings 18). Surely, sin should be rebuked whether or not it is a ruler who committed it.

The error then must have been in the manner in which the rebuke was spoken. When rebuking sin in the lives of those in authority over us, we must still recognize their position and speak respectfully, recognizing our place of subjection to them. The error must have been that Paul responded bitterly, calling him a whitewashed wall, and affirming that God would strike him.

(3) The greatest problem, however, is how Paul could have made such a mistake if he was inspired. Matthew 10:19,20 promised that God would tell men what to say in such cases. If Paul spoke by inspiration, he could not have erred. The only sensible explanation is that Paul was so upset by the injustice of the act that he spoke on his own authority without waiting for or using Divine guidance. One may wonder if such a thing

could have happened on other occasions; however, this case clearly tells us that Paul made an error here.

(4) Stringer suggests another possible explanation: that Paul's statement was spoken in irony or sarcasm. The idea is that perhaps Paul spoke as if he apologized, not because he was really sorry, but to make the point that he did not recognize the high priest because he was not acting as a high priest should act. I.e., Paul could not imagine that a high priest would do such a thing, so he naturally assumed the man was not the high priest or he would have known better than to do to Paul what he had done. This view seems somewhat strained in light of the fact that Paul quoted a Scripture for his apology.

23:6 – Paul stirred controversy by claiming he was on trial for believing in the resurrection.

At this point Paul knew he would receive no justice here. They would even punish him for claiming innocence! Rather than offering logical proof of his position to men who were obviously bigoted, he simply raised an issue that he knew divided these men.

Some council members were Sadducees and some were Pharisees. Paul sided with the Pharisees saying that he himself was a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee, and that he was really on trial because of the resurrection of the dead.

This was true in the sense that Paul believed in the resurrection of the dead, and in fact he went further than any of them did. He was called to be an eyewitness for Jesus, who had been raised from the dead. He preached Jesus' resurrection everywhere and it was this preaching that was one of the reasons people were so upset at his preaching. (Compare 1 Corinthians 15.)

In what sense was Paul a Pharisee? In the same sense that he was a Jew. He had been born into that belief and raised in it. Though he had been religiously converted from Judaism to the gospel, his present beliefs were just the fulfillment of what he had formerly believed and were not really a contradiction of those beliefs. The Pharisees professed to strictly believe in the law of God, so what Paul now believed was really consistent with what he had professed as a Pharisee all along.

23:7,8 – Paul's statement caused dissension between the Sadducees and the Pharisees in the council.

Paul probably intended for his statement to produce the effect that it did. Sadducees believe there is no such thing as resurrection because they believe there is no such thing as angels or spirits. Their beliefs led to all the consequences Paul described in 1 Corinthians 15. The only blessing one could receive from God would be in this life. (They were "sad, you see"!) Note that all materialists today share the same beliefs as the Sadducees held. They too are "of all men most pitiable."

The Pharisees, however, believed all these things that the Sadducees denied. This was the cause of the strife.

It appeared that this was an act of strategy on Paul's part. It enabled him to affirm a basic truth of the gospel and at the same time gave him something in common with a large part of his audience. It divided his opposition so they turned against one another instead of opposing him. Further, it showed the Romans that Paul had been arrested for religious reasons, not because he had done some crime or personal injury. In fact, many of his accusers agreed with him and disagreed with one another.

23:9,10 – As a result the Pharisees defended Paul. This caused so much strife that the commander rescued Paul.

The Pharisees said they could find nothing wrong with Paul, and that maybe he had received his message from an angel or spirit (which of course was true). If so and they opposed him, they would be fighting against God. This, of course, just antagonized the Sadducees further since they were convinced there was no such thing as angel or spirit.

The strife among the council members became so great that the commander again became afraid for Paul's life. He ordered the soldiers to remove Paul by force from the meeting and bring him safely to the castle. He had done his duty to give Paul's enemies the chance to state their case, but they failed to achieve their ends because they were divided and could not really prove him guilty of wrong anyway.

23:11-35 - A Plot against Paul; His Transfer to Caesarea

23:11 – The Lord appeared to Paul and promised that he would testify for Jesus in Rome.

The Lord had once before appeared to Paul to comfort and strengthen him in time of great persecution (18:9,10). Now in that Jerusalem prison, He spoke again. He told Paul to cheer up because, as he had testified for Jesus in Jerusalem, so he would in Rome. This prophecy was fulfilled in the following chapters; however, Paul went, not as he had originally intended, but as a prisoner.

Note again that God was there for Paul in his time of need. Doubtless Paul was greatly discouraged in that Jerusalem prison. He had hoped to go to Rome, but now it appeared that there was no way to accomplish that. But God assured Paul that he would not be killed in Jerusalem but would be allowed to continue to teach for the Lord, even in the capital city of the empire. The Lord is there for us too, but by other means than by direct revelations.

Note how God often brings about what is best for us – maybe even what we had hoped would happen – but sometimes in a way entirely different from what we had hoped or planned. We may have plans for what we think would be good, and these plans may be perfectly moral and upright. Yet, God may bring about something entirely different or in an entirely different manner. This does not mean He has deserted us or does

not hear our prayers. Nor are His plans inferior to ours. He just has different ways of accomplishing what He really needs us to do in His service.

23:12,13 – The next day forty Jews vowed that they would not eat or drink till they had killed Paul.

Luke then records that forty Jews made an oath, swearing with a curse that they would not eat or drink till they had killed Paul. This, of course, was intended to show both the seriousness and the urgency of their intent. They meant to accomplish it and to do so quickly.

One wonders how it would feel to know that such a group of men had so conspired against one. The remainder of the story reveals, however, that these men either broke their oath or else they died of thirst and starvation! This shows the folly of such oaths. (Stringer, however, states that Jewish law allowed for release from such an oath if it could not be carried out, so the matter was not as severe as it sounded.)

23:14,15 – These forty assassins requested the help of the Jewish leaders.

They revealed their plot to the chief priests and elders and asked them to call the commander to bring Paul before them for another hearing. The men then planned to kill Paul as he was being brought to the meeting.

It is incredible that these Jewish leaders would even listen to such a plan, let alone cooperate with it. The very fact that forty men could brazenly make such a proposal shows that the corruption of these leaders was known. The rulers considered themselves to be the righteous leaders of the people of God, yet here they openly willing to be accessories to a murder!

Doubtless they justified themselves on the grounds that they believed Paul was worthy of death for violating the law, yet the Roman authorities made it impossible for them to carry out such an execution. Despite such rationalizations, the fact remained that the plot constituted nothing but bold-faced murder. Paul had not been convicted in a proper trial according to the law – neither Roman nor Jewish law. Furthermore, such an ambush would likely result in violence or death to other people besides Paul, especially the Romans who guarded Paul. Yet none of this stopped the Jewish leaders. This shows that men indeed can rationalize the most obvious forms of evil.

23:16-19 – Paul’s nephew revealed the plot to Paul.

By the providence of God, however, Paul’s nephew (his sister’s son) heard about the plot and was able to go into the barracks, or the castle, to warn Paul about it. Paul asked a centurion to take the young man to the commanding officer so the message could be conveyed to him. This was done, and the commander asked the young man privately what the message was.

Doubtless, this was the means the Lord used to fulfill his promise to Paul that he would be spared. It is interesting that Paul had a sister. Little is ever told us about his family. We do not know if his sister was a Christian, but she or her son was at least concerned for Paul's life. We are not told specifically how he learned about the plot; but with forty men involved, it would be hard to keep such a plot well hidden.

23:20-22 – The nephew then spoke to the commander.

The centurion heard the story from the young man, just as we have already been told it. The commander sent the young man away urging him not to tell others that he had revealed this plot to the commander.

No doubt the commander did not want the forty men to be aware that their plot was known. In this way, he could take the necessary measures to protect Paul without the forty men or the Jewish rulers realizing that he was deliberately attempting to thwart them. He could send Paul away that night unknown to the Jews. Then, when the request was made the next day, he could simply say Paul was no longer in town. This approach not only protected Paul but avoided a confrontation between the Jews and the commander. And of course, if no one knew the role Paul's nephew had played, no one could take any vengeance on him. This showed great wisdom on the commander's part.

23:23,24 – The commander provided a substantial armed guard to accompany Paul to the governor.

He called two centurions and commanded them to prepare their soldiers (two hundred of them) plus seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen, to take Paul to Caesarea. They were to provide also horses for Paul, and take him the third hour of the night (beginning at 9:00) to go to Felix the governor.

These were, of course, extreme measures and showed that the commander was seriously determined to keep Paul safe. The soldiers would greatly outnumber the forty men who had made the vow. Roman rulers took very seriously the responsibility to protect a prisoner, especially if he was a Roman citizen. The chief captain (commander) made certain he did not fail.

Moving Paul to Caesarea would remove him from the source of danger in Jerusalem, and would also save the commander from further responsibility. Paul would become the responsibility of the governor himself, Felix.

23:25-30 – The commander sent Paul to the governor along with a letter explaining what happened.

The letter explained who Paul was and why the commander had sent him to Felix. From this letter we learn several things. We learn that the commander's name was Claudius Lysias. We also learn that he now realized that Paul was accused only of things pertaining to Jewish law,

but had done nothing worthy of death or bonds (though he did not release him but kept him in bonds!). He was hoping Felix would hear the case himself and decide it. He said that he had commanded Paul's accusers to bring their charges before Felix. Of course, he had not done this yet at the time he wrote the letter, but doubtless he intended to accomplish it before Felix would receive the letter.

The most interesting parts of the letters are the ones where the commander changed the facts to make himself look good. He made himself out to be a hero even where, in fact, he had done wrong. Actually, he had done a great service to Paul and protected him well, but he did some wrong things too that somehow get covered up!

He said he rescued Paul because he heard he was a Roman citizen. He conveniently changed the story so as to omit the fact he did not find out Paul was a citizen until after he had rescued him and illegally bound him and made all preparations to illegally beat him!

Lies such as this are to be expected from worldly people. Unfortunately, we are all tempted to cover up for ourselves. Are we guilty of such lies for our own convenience?

23:31-33 – Paul was delivered to the governor in Caesarea.

The soldiers did as commanded and took Paul that night to a town called Antipatris (see *map*). The next day the horsemen continued with Paul but the soldiers returned, evidently believing that the danger had been avoided. The horsemen then continued on and delivered Paul and the letter to the governor in Caesarea.

23:34,35 – The governor agreed to hear Paul's case.

The governor read the letter and asked what province Paul was from. When he was informed that Paul was from Cilicia, he agreed to hear the case. He commanded Paul to be kept in Herod's Praetorium until his accusers could come and Felix could hear both sides.

Thus Paul escaped this danger even as God had promised he would.

Acts 24

24:1-27 - Paul's Defense before Felix

24:1-9 – The accusation against Paul

24:1 – Jewish leaders came bringing an orator named Tertullus to make accusations against Paul.

Five days later, after Paul had escaped the plots of the Jews and been kept safely by Felix, the high priest Ananias came for a hearing to accuse Paul before the governor. With him came an orator named Tertullus. The term orator means that he was a skilled speaker, not necessarily that he was knowledgeable in the law.

24:2-4 – Tertullus began by flattering Felix.

Tertullus began his accusation against Paul by speaking of the peace the people enjoyed and the prosperity that the governor's wisdom had brought. He affirmed that the Jews accepted these benefits with gratitude.

This of course was flattery to gain the governor's favor. (McGarvey claims that Felix really had benefited the people by suppressing robbery, etc. But Stringer says that many scholars dispute this, some even saying that Felix' cruelty contributed to the Jewish War.)

The truth is that this governor, whether or not he was a relatively good one, represented Roman rule over the Jews. The Jews hated all foreign domination, certainly that of the Romans. While some good may have come from Roman rule, the Jews had little gratitude for it. But Tertullus assumed he might get better results by buttering up the governor.

Tertullus said he would not be further tedious, but would get on with his purpose for speaking to the governor.

24:5-7 – Tertullus said Paul was a plague, the ringleader of a sect, who caused dissension and defiled their temple.

(1) He claimed Paul was a plague or a "pestilent fellow" (ASV). This was a prejudicial term. Anyone could say this about someone he disliked, but there was no criminal significance to it. Its only purpose was to prejudice the mind of the governor.

(2) He said Paul was a creator of dissension ("insurrection" – ASV) among Jews everywhere he went. This would be a more serious charge, especially to the Roman authorities. If the implication was rebellion against the government, then the Romans would be seriously concerned.

Causing riots and uproars would be a concern, even if there was no rebellion against the government involved.

Nevertheless, anyone can make accusations. What proof was offered? None at all! The truth of course is that, everywhere Paul went he simply taught and persuaded men with evidence. But the Jews had repeatedly started riots and persecution against him, as they had in the present instance, because he was converting people away from Judaism. So, the Jews themselves, not Paul, were responsible for the disturbance of the peace. As so often is the case, the accusers tried to blame others for what they themselves had committed.

(3) He said Paul was a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. This sounds inflammatory, as though some gang was conspiring against the government. But many movements existed, especially religious movements, without threatening the government or committing any crime. Where was the crime against Rome in this? No proof is offered.

(4) Finally, he accused Paul of attempting to profane the temple. This was actually getting to the issues involved (21:28). The issues were religious in nature. But even this was not the real issue but simply an excuse. Unless some violence or physical damage was done to the temple, why should the Romans care if a Gentile entered the Jewish temple?

The real problem the Jews had with Paul was that, in their view, he had left the Jewish faith and was teaching others that they should no longer follow these Jewish leaders. Yet even in this matter they again offered no proof but simply made charges.

Tertullus then affirmed (compare ASV footnote) that the Jews would have punished Paul according to their own law, but the commander Claudius Lysias had prevented them from doing so by violently taking Paul from them.

Like Claudius, they conveniently left out some rather significant details at this point. They forgot to mention that they were not giving Paul a fair trial at all. They started a riot and began beating him to death without any trial of any kind. That hardly constitutes judging someone "according to law." No witnesses were called and no evidence supplied. It was a mob lynching. But of course, that could not be admitted, so Tertullus conveniently whitewashed the truth.

Further, they imply that Claudius did violence to them, but conveniently forgot to mention that the reason force was necessary on his part was that the Jews had started a riot and were violently assaulting Paul, about to kill him.

This is an outstanding example of the kind of political whitewashing that comes when men are determined to save face and accomplish their purpose regardless of the truth. We see similar examples regularly today in government, in religion, and elsewhere.

24:8,9 – Tertullus claimed their accusations could be proved by questioning Paul.

He concluded his accusations by saying that Lysias told Paul's accusers to go before the governor (which explained why they were there). They said the governor could get all the proof he needed of these accusations against Paul simply by cross-examining Paul. The other Jews then joined in the accusations, confirming that all these things were true.

Yet it is amazing that Tertullus offered not one shred of evidence. All he did was make accusations. He, in effect, urged the governor to convict Paul from Paul's own testimony. This is thoroughly illegal, and no civilized government should tolerate it. It would be especially ineffective when attempted against a Roman citizen.

Anyone can make accusations and tell lies. That is simply one man's word against another. Even if many people make the accusations, that does not prove them to be true. There must be evidence. For non-Romans to make accusations against a Roman would get them nowhere without proof. The accused was not required to provide the evidence, nor was he guilty as charged until he proved himself innocent. Rather, the accusers had to present proof. In this case they had given none.

24:10-21 – Paul's answer to the accusations against him

24:10 – Paul began his defense.

After the governor had motioned to him to speak, Paul said that he was glad to answer since he knew that Felix had been a judge for many years. Felix was experienced in such matters and could be expected to know the law and how it would apply in such cases.

Note that a guilty man does not want justice, but an innocent man does. He does not fear justice. Only injustice can harm him.

24:11-13 – Paul succinctly answered each accusation against him, saying they had no evidence as proof.

His answer was short and to the point. He said that Felix should already know that he had entered Jerusalem only twelve days earlier, and he went there to worship. His point seems to be that he had no time to foment all the trouble these men imagined. Of those twelve days, several had been spent in prison after the riot. The argument is not conclusive, but it is highly unlikely that he could cause such trouble as he had been accused of in so short a time.

During this time in Jerusalem, no one had found Paul doing any of the rabble-rousing activities they had accused him of. He had not incited any crowd in the temple, synagogue, or anywhere in the city. In short, there was no proof of their claim that he stirred up dissension. His conduct had been entirely unlike that of one seeking to cause dissension. He had come to worship, not to cause trouble.

Finally, he claimed that they could not prove their accusations against him. This was the critical issue. The burden of proof was on

them. If they had charges against him, they had to prove them.. It was not up to Paul to provide the proof for them (as Tertullus had implied), nor was it proper to accuse him without proof. If they had a case against him, it was their job to give the evidence. He was innocent till proved guilty.

Note that it is proper, when we are accused of wrongdoing, to point out the principles of justice that ought to apply. We have every right to point out that we are not obligated to provide proof of our innocence. The accusers must provide proof of guilt. Anyone can make accusations.

24:14 – Paul affirmed instead that he worshiped God according to the way they had called a sect.

Having so easily dismissed their accusations against him, Paul, then took the opportunity to affirm his service to God. He began by referring to their accusation that he was a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He confessed openly that He served God according to the Way that they called a sect. However, this involved no wrongdoing, not even according to their law (let alone Roman law), because his beliefs completely harmonized with the Law and the Prophets.

A “sect” is a heresy, division, or departure from truth. The Jews had so referred to Paul’s beliefs; he did not admit that part, but only that they so called it. He himself affirmed his belief to be the true Way that was in accord with God’s word. Paul claimed, not that he practiced the Old Law as binding today, but that his belief harmonized with that Law. The law provided within itself that it would be replaced when the Messiah came.

As in Paul’s day, so today Jesus’ true church is often falsely accused of being a “sect,” “cult,” or “denomination.” We should respond as Paul did. We should not be ashamed to affirm that we are part of the church, yet we should never admit that it is a heresy, division, or departure from the truth. It is the Way that is based on truth, and other beliefs are departures from it! Our proof that this is valid is the Scriptures.

In so saying, Paul showed that the real issues here were religious in nature. The disagreement had nothing whatever to do with Roman law but was simply a matter of how God should be worshiped.

24:15 – Paul hoped for a resurrection of the just and the unjust.

Furthermore, Paul affirmed that his convictions harmonized with the very hope held by his accusers. Their only real hope (whether or not they realized it) was in the resurrection of the dead. (The Pharisees believed this, while the Sadducees did not, but it was still the only hope for anyone for eternal life.) On this point, Paul’s view agreed with the Old Testament Scriptures that these Jews professed to believe. If they believed their own law, they should have been defending Paul, not accusing him!

Note that Paul here clearly affirmed that the resurrection of the dead is a fundamental truth of God's plan for man, clearly taught in the Scriptures. Further, there will be **one** resurrection that will include both the just and the unjust (compare John 5:28,29). This destroys the pre-millennial claim that there will be two resurrections – one for the good and another for the evil – separated by 1000 years.

24:16 – Paul also defended himself on the basis of a pure conscience.

Because Paul believed in this resurrection, he sought to please God and always tried to have a conscience pure before God and man (see as in 23:1). He would not admit that he had violated the law, either of God or man. He was very concerned about having a clean conscience. We ought to do the same. What about you and me: Do we have consciences that are pure regarding our conduct both toward God and toward man?

As in 23:1, the fact one has a clear conscience would not, of itself, prove he had not sinned. One can have a clear conscience, like Paul had before conversion, and yet be in sin because his beliefs are wrong. Yet one still should not violate his conscience. If our beliefs are wrong, we should study God's word and change our beliefs, but we should not violate what we believe to be right. A clear conscience is necessary to please God, but by itself alone is no guarantee that we are right.

But Paul's point here is that they should not expect his testimony to convict him of wrong doing, since his conscience was clear. He knew of no wrong he had done against God's law or man's.

24:17 – Paul had come to Jerusalem to bring gifts, not to cause trouble.

Paul then explained the real nature of his visit to Jerusalem. He had not come to stir up insurrection nor to profane the temple, as they accused. He had come on the peaceful and benevolent mission of bringing gifts to his nation (the Jews). This refers to the collections of funds the churches had sent to the needy saints in Jerusalem (see notes on 20:1-6; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; etc.). This reference shows that this was the occasion when Paul brought the funds referred to in 1 Corinthians 16, etc.

Paul had no such sinister motives as he had been accused of. He had come for the good of the people. The accusations against him were entirely groundless.

24:18,19 – Paul had been arrested while worshiping in the temple without disturbance.

Having come to bring these gifts, Paul also went into the temple to be purified. Yet, though he admitted being in the temple, he denied causing tumults or riots. He was peaceably attempting to worship God.

While he was in the temple, some Jews from Asia had brought accusations against him (21:27,28). If they were the ones who made the

original accusations, they should have been there on the present occasion to give their testimony against Paul. Yet they were not present, so what case could be made against him?

Paul did not admit these Jews had a case against him, but they were the only ones to claim any personal eyewitness evidence. Without the eyewitnesses, all testimony was hearsay; so how could he be convicted without their testimony? Again, Paul showed that the real point to remember is that there was no one who could give any real evidence against him.

24:20,21 – Paul’s worst “wrong” had been that he spoke in favor of the resurrection.

The men who had come to accuse Paul could not witness anything against him, since they had not been present to see any of the things they accused him of. The only thing any of these men had personally witnessed regarding him was what they heard him say when he was before the council in Acts 23. He called on them to present evidence they found against him at that hearing.

The only thing he had done before the council, which could even be considered, was the fact he had called out that he was being judged because of his belief in the resurrection. This had caused great disturbance among them at the time; but that problem was caused, not because he did wrong, but because they disagreed among themselves about the resurrection. By calling attention to this fact, Paul again demonstrated that the only real issues here were matters of religious doctrine that should be of no concern to the Roman government.

Paul had reached the conclusion of his defense. The whole thrust was, first to show that the Jews had no evidence whatever against him, and second that the issues involved were religious issues that would not be of any concern to the Roman authorities. In the process, he had been able to present some of the religious views that he hoped would interest the listeners in learning more about the gospel.

24:22-27 – Paul’s further discussion with Felix

24:22,23 – Felix postponed a decision but allowed Paul’s friends to visit him.

As a result of this first hearing before Felix, the governor had a better understanding of the Way. He adjourned the meeting till he could obtain evidence from the commander of the Roman garrison in Jerusalem. After he heard from Lysias, he would make a decision.

Actually, this was just postponing his duty. He already knew from Lysias’ letter that Paul had done nothing worthy of being imprisoned (23:29). This initial hearing before the Jews should have made clear that Paul’s enemies had no proof against him. Felix should have released Paul, but apparently still wanted to please the Jews.

In the meantime, he commanded the Roman centurion to keep Paul in guard, but to allow him a significant amount of liberty. In particular, Paul was allowed to have free visiting from his friends. It is interesting throughout Paul's imprisonment to observe how many freedoms were granted him. No doubt this not only boosted his morale, but it also enabled him to accomplish some teaching in writing and in person to those who visited.

24:24,25 – When Paul taught about righteousness, self-control, and judgment, Felix said he would talk more when it was convenient.

In the meantime, while Paul remained imprisoned, Felix and his wife Drusilla decided to hear what Paul had to say about the faith in Jesus. Paul preached numerous times to Felix, but Felix did not obey. He left Judea two years later leaving Paul still a prisoner. There is no reason to believe he ever obeyed (verses 26,27).

History records Felix was a very evil man. Roman historian Tacitus said of him: "He reveled in cruelty and lust, and wielded the power of a king with the mind of a slave" (*Zondervan's Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, p. 282). Josephus said that Drusilla was the daughter of Herod Agrippa (whom God slew in Acts 12) and had been another man's wife, but had divorced her first husband to marry Felix (see McGarvey and *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* on "Drusilla"). Some think Felix too had been married before. It is certain from Acts 24:26 that Felix desired bribes.

The very fact Paul taught such a man is a lesson of itself. How many of us would have kept quiet, thinking such a man was not interested or might even cause harm if we told him he was evil? Yet Paul taught Felix.

The account indicates Felix was a case of **non-conversion**. We can learn some lessons here that show us how some people miss salvation, and that warn us we too will miss salvation if we do the same.

Note what Paul taught Felix:

*** The need for righteousness**

Righteousness refers to the quality or condition of being right, especially right in God's eyes. Specifically, it refers to the state of being in accord or harmony with the laws of God. It is opposite to wickedness or sinfulness. This state of being right is essential to our well-being in this life and in eternity. (Acts 10:35; Matthew 25:46; 1 Peter 4:18; 1 Peter 3:12; 2 Timothy 4:8)

Romans 3:10 – There is none righteous, no not one (3:23). If we wish to receive eternal life, we must be righteous. Sin or unrighteousness leads to eternal death (6:23). But we have all sinned. Not one of us can say we have lived sinlessly and so have earned eternal life.

1 Peter 2:24 – Jesus bore our sins in His body so we, having died to sin, might live to righteousness. Because we have sinned, we deserve

punishment. Jesus lived righteously and did not deserve punishment, but He was made to suffer for us. By Jesus' blood, sinners can be made righteous (2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 10:9,10). The gospel message is that all men can **become** righteous, despite the fact we have all sinned. [1 Corinthians 1:30; Philippians 3:9]

Yet many fail to allow Jesus to make them righteous. Felix was one of these. There may be many reasons why some refuse to come to Jesus to be made righteous; but whatever the reason, if like Felix we do not choose to become righteous, then we will never be saved.

*** The need for self-control**

2 Peter 1:5-9 – Self-control (temperance) is in the list of qualities we must add to our faith. If we lack such qualities, we are blind and have forgotten our cleansing from sins. Note that being cleansed from sin does not allow us to live as we please, but rather requires us to learn to live as God pleases. [2 Timothy 3:3; Titus 2:12; Romans 6:13-20]

Yet many do not see the importance of self-control. Too often people become Christians without being adequately instructed ahead of time about the need to control their thoughts, words, and deeds to serve God faithfully after forgiveness. Paul did not neglect such teaching, but plainly instructed Felix even while he was not yet a Christian.

One sure way to miss salvation is to fail to determine to control yourself to obey God. This happened to Felix.

*** The need to prepare for judgment**

Paul also reasoned with Felix about judgment to come (verse 25). This too is a fundamental part of learning faith in Jesus. Jesus will come to judge and reward all men eternally.

Matthew 25:31-46 – At the judgment, all nations will be gathered before Jesus who will separate them on the basis of how they lived. Righteous people receive eternal life (verse 46), but wicked people receive eternal punishment (verse 46) in the lake of fire (verse 41). [Romans 2:5-10; 2 Corinthians 5:10]

Often people do not like “hell-fire and brimstone” preaching. But people need to be warned about eternal destinies because often they don't understand the eternal consequences of disobedience. Paul taught Felix about judgment to come. We should take warning from Paul's teaching here, and we should also warn others as Paul did. Such preaching may terrify people, as it did Felix, but it still needs to be done.

Felix' responded by postponing a decision.

Felix postponed obedience saying he would call for Paul when he had “a convenient season” (verse 25). He apparently understood what Paul said and it terrified him. But he did not obey because it was not convenient at that time. So it is for many today. Jesus requires personal sacrifice, not personal convenience.

Romans 12:1,2 – We must present our bodies as living **sacrifices** to God. Don't conform to the world, but be transformed by renewing our minds. Religion is not a matter of personal convenience. We must be willing to **inconvenience** ourselves for Him. [Acts 14:22; Matthew 7:13,14]

Matthew 16:24-27 – To be Jesus' disciple, we must **deny self**, take the cross, and follow Him. We must be willing to give up our lives in His service. Does this sound like a life of personal convenience? Jesus demands self-denial. To pursue convenience is to please self, not deny self. [2 Corinthians 5:14,15]

Although he was terrified by the message Paul presented, Felix postponed obedience. Two years later he left town without obeying, and there is no indication that he ever obeyed.

If you are unwilling to serve God because it's too difficult, Satan will see to it that there are always plenty of difficulties. But if you decide to try serving Jesus because you found a time when serving Him was convenient, Jesus would not accept it! He demands self-denial. You must be willing to give up everything, even your life, if necessary, to please Him (Luke 14:25-33). Service to Him is unacceptable if we are not willing to make such sacrifices. The truth is that you simply cannot serve God conveniently – Satan won't let you and God won't let you.

Further, you can't be forgiven without **repenting** of sin, and you can't repent without being **sorry** (2 Corinthians 7:10). If you postpone because you don't want to make the sacrifice, then you just are not sorry enough for sin. Until you are sorry enough to make up your mind to obey regardless of the cost, you don't have enough repentance to be forgiven.

When people postpone, they often never obey. When people know enough, but delay and delay, they are in real danger of never obeying. [James 4:14; Luke 12:16-21]

2 Corinthians 6:2 – Today is the day of salvation. Now is the accepted time.

Many people today follow the same pattern as Felix. They hear the gospel and recognize the consequences, but their desire to be right is not strong enough to motivate them to exercise self-control to prepare for judgment. They are not willing to inconvenience themselves to fully serve Jesus, so they postpone obedience.

24:26,27 – Felix spoke with Paul often but left him bound when he was replaced by Festus.

In spite of the effect of Paul's message, Felix continued to listen to it during the following months. However, he had an ulterior motive. He hoped that Paul would give him a bribe so he could be released. Perhaps this hope was promoted, in his perverted mind, by the fact that Paul had so many friends and the fact he had collected alms to be taken to Jerusalem.

This demonstrates Felix' evil character. He should have released Paul because it was unjust to hold him in prison, but he was more interested in money. It also shows us the character of Paul that he would not offer a bribe even if necessary to obtain his own release from prison.

Two years later Felix was replaced as governor by another man, Porcius Festus. Felix left Paul in prison as a favor to the Jews. Note again that it was not a matter of what was just or right but a matter of pleasing people. Josephus adds that the reason Felix wanted to please the Jews was that he left office in disgrace and he hoped they would testify favorably on his behalf when his case came up in Rome.

Acts 25

25:1-12 - Paul's Defense before Festus

25:1-3 – The Jews asked Festus to bring Paul to Jerusalem for trial, hoping to ambush him on the way.

Just three days after he began to serve as governor, Festus went to Jerusalem, where he met with the Jewish leaders. This indicates diligence in his work, as he presumably wanted to get to know the people with whom he must work and whose cooperation he would need as governor. They told Festus what they had against Paul, and asked Festus to bring Paul to Jerusalem for a hearing.

However, their real goal was to try to accomplish the plot that had been foiled earlier when Claudius Lysias had sent Paul to Felix. They hoped to ambush Paul along the road and kill him as he was being transported to Jerusalem. Since this plot had failed before, they apparently thought they might accomplish it with a new and uninformed ruler.

Surely it is clear now that these Jewish leaders were willing, not just to cooperate with murder, but even to help plot and arrange it (see notes on 23:14ff).

24:4,5 – Festus told the Jews to come to Caesarea to accuse Paul.

Festus refused to agree with the Jews' plans. Instead, he said that Paul was at Caesarea and should stay there. However, he said that he would return to Caesarea soon, and these men could come and make accusation against Paul there.

The account does not indicate that Festus suspected a plot, though he may have heard about the previous plot against Paul. Perhaps it just made more sense for the accusers to come to him in Caesarea. In any case, the Jews' plot failed again.

Note that, at this point Paul had been imprisoned unjustly for two years (24:27) despite the fact he was innocent and nothing had been proved against him. Little had been done to resolve his case. The Roman rulers apparently knew he was innocent and implied or stated so several times. Yet the Jews were still so filled with hatred toward him that they were plotting, not just to testify against him, but to murder him. Despite his Roman citizenship, the treatment he received was thoroughly unjust.

25:6-8 – After Festus had returned to Caesarea, the Jews came and accused Paul, again without evidence.

Festus stayed more than ten more days in Jerusalem, then returned to Caesarea. There he promptly fulfilled his promise to the Jews for a hearing regarding Paul. The very next day Paul was commanded to be brought, and the Jews came to make accusations against him.

The scene was repeated much as it had occurred before Felix (see chapter 24). The Jews made all kinds of accusations against Paul, but they had no proof. Paul simply denied the claims and pointed out the lack of evidence. He claimed he had done no wrong whatever against Jewish law, against the temple, or against the Roman law of the Caesars. These were the three areas regarding which the Jews had previously accused him. See notes on 24:13 and context.

25:9 – Festus asked Paul if he would go to Jerusalem for trial.

Despite the fact that the Jews had no proof against Paul, Festus wanted to gain favor with them, so he asked Paul if he was willing to go to Jerusalem to stand trial regarding these matters. As a new ruler, Festus probably wanted to do the Jews a favor so he could have a good start with them.

However, he was at least decent enough to ask Paul about the matter. Doubtless, he suspected Paul was innocent (see Paul's comment in verse 10) and surely knew he was a Roman citizen. He probably knew he could get in trouble if he forced Paul to stand trial before the Jews, but it did not hurt to ask Paul about it. Then if Paul refused, at least the Jews could not say he did not try.

25:10,11 – Paul appealed to Caesar.

Now whether or not Festus knew about the previous plot against Paul's life, Paul surely knew. He no doubt smelled this new plot immediately. He may not have been warned about it, as he had the first time, but the danger was all too obvious. His life would be in far greater danger in Jerusalem, the headquarters of Jewish fanaticism. He had needed rescuing several times in just the three days he had been there!

In Caesarea Paul knew he was much safer than in Jerusalem. However, even here he had not received justice but had remained imprisoned indefinitely. It was obvious that Festus wanted to please the Jews. Had there been hope that this new governor might give him justice, Paul might have responded differently. But Festus' response evidently caused Paul to believe that he would have better hope being tried completely away from Jewish territory.

He replied that he had a right, as a Roman citizen, to be tried by the Romans, not the Jews. Besides, he had not wronged the Jews in any way. He affirmed that even Festus knew this. It was clear that the Jews could not prove anything. Claudius had admitted his innocence. Had the previous governor Felix found anything against Paul, he would surely have

punished him. Now Festus gave no reason to believe he had found anything against Paul; yet instead of releasing him, he was considering a step that would clearly endanger Paul's life.

There was no proof against Paul, and everyone knew it. Paul said he was willing to be punished, even to the point of death, if he had been truly guilty. But it would be a miscarriage of justice for him to be turned over to the Jews when there was no proof. It was clear that he was not going to receive justice as long as he remained in Judea.

Therefore, Paul determined to exercise his Roman rights again. He appealed his case to be heard by Caesar himself. All Romans had this right, at least for certain kinds of accusations. This was similar to an American appealing to the Supreme Court, except that in Paul's case he appealed before any verdict had been reached. It was the best way to guarantee that Festus could not turn him over to the Jews. Paul's decision may also have been influenced by the fact that for some time he had desired to go to Rome (Acts 23:11; 19:21).

Again Paul used his Roman rights for his protection and the furthering of the gospel. Our country too grants us certain rights, and we may use them for our good as Paul here did for his good. (Compare 22:25-29).

25:12 – Festus agreed to Paul's appeal.

Festus conferred with the council, and then agreed Paul would go to Caesar. Actually, Festus had no choice about the matter. The council, according to ASV footnote, was not the Jewish council but was probably a group of Roman advisors, legal experts, etc. They no doubt assured Festus he had no choice but to send Paul to Caesar. In any case, not only would this course satisfy Paul's desire for justice, but it would rid Festus of any responsibility before the Jews. The matter was taken out of his hands regardless of what the Jews wanted.

25:13-27 - Agrippa and Bernice Visit Festus

25:13 – Agrippa and Bernice came to visit Festus.

Some days after Paul had appealed to Caesar, a king named Agrippa, along with a woman named Bernice, came to visit Festus. Agrippa ruled Chalcis (in the area of modern Lebanon) and later Galilee. McGarvey and Stringer say this Agrippa was a son of the Herod who killed James (Acts 12). Imagine being in Paul's place and standing trial before such a man.

Bernice was Agrippa's sister. Coffman and Stringer say that Agrippa and Bernice had an incestuous relationship. Presumably, they were paying a courtesy visit to get to know the new governor and to establish a working relationship with him.

25:14,15 – After some time, Festus told Agrippa about Paul’s case.

Agrippa and Bernice ended up having a lengthy stay with Festus, and eventually Paul’s case came up for discussion. Festus told them that he had inherited Paul as a prisoner when Felix left office. When Festus had been in Jerusalem, the Jewish chief priests and elders made accusations against Paul and asked Festus for a ruling against him (see 25:1ff).

25:16,17 – Festus had insisted that Paul have a hearing before his accusers.

Festus had told the Jews that he could not make a ruling, especially not for a man to be killed, without first having a hearing in which the accusers face the man they accuse, so he can answer their charges. So, after he had returned to Caesarea, these Jewish leaders came and the next day he had a hearing and brought Paul in. Festus may here be exaggerating the nobility of his motives, nevertheless he accurately described the events.

Note that proper procedure, in any case of justice, is that a man should have a right to confront his accusers, hear their accusations against him, and reply. This was Roman law, but it is also fundamental justice. As we often say, “There are two sides to every story.” Not only should both sides be heard, but both sides should be heard at the same time in a face-to-face meeting. To seek to render a decision in any case of accusation, without insisting on a personal meeting, is to promote injustice.

25:18,19 – The Jews’ accusations pertained to religion, especially whether Jesus had been raised from the dead.

Festus then stated his evaluation of the accusations against Paul. They were not the kind of things he had expected (no doubt, he had expected some accusations of criminal activity, sedition, or other such issues that would legitimately concern Roman authority). But the accusations pertained to matters of religious beliefs and specifically to Paul’s claim that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Note that Festus here effectively admitted that Paul did not deserve the treatment he was receiving. This is what Paul had claimed earlier (25:10; see 25:25). Paul was in prison because of his religious convictions, not because of anything that would concern Roman authorities. Festus was the third Roman ruler to state a similar conclusion, yet Paul was still in prison (compare 23:29). Roman rulers seem good at recognizing innocence but not good at acting accordingly.

25:20,21 – Paul had then appealed to Caesar.

Festus said that, because the accusations pertained to religious issues that he was not familiar with, he was uncertain how to rule. So, he asked Paul if he would agree to go to Jerusalem to be judged about these matters. However, Paul refused and instead appealed his case to Caesar

("Augustus"), so Festus had kept him in prison till he could send him to Caesar.

Again Festus, like Claudius Lysias, did not quite tell the whole story. He makes it sound like his decision was simply a matter of uncertainty about the issues involved. Actually, he had asked Paul to go to Jerusalem because he wanted to do a favor to the Jews (verse 9), not because of any uncertainty about the issues. Rulers then, like today, were good at "spinning" the facts to their own advantage.

25:22,23 – Agrippa agreed to hear Paul's case.

Agrippa apparently found the case interesting, so he said he wanted to hear Paul's case. Festus decided that, on the next day, he would arrange a hearing for Paul before Agrippa.

Agrippa and Bernice entered the judgment hall the next day accompanied by great pomp, such as often accompanies the entries of kings. Other important men and commanders were also present. Probably Festus arranged such pomp and ceremony, not because he thought Paul was so important, but as a way to honor Agrippa and Bernice. Nevertheless, the result presented Paul with a great opportunity to tell the gospel message to many prominent people.

Coffman observes that, at the time of this hearing, these rulers and advisers were important people, whereas Paul was a prisoner. Today, however, Paul is widely known; but no one would ever have heard of these men were it not for this story about Paul. This shows the folly of trusting in earthly fame and power.

25:24-27 – Festus said the purpose of the hearing was to justify why Paul was being sent to Caesar.

Festus then addressed the crowd and introduced Paul as the man that all the Jews wanted to have executed. He said that Paul had done nothing worthy of death, yet he had appealed to Caesar. Note once again the admission of Paul's innocence (see v18). In fact, so sure was Festus that the charges made against Paul were insignificant or unproved that he did not even know what charges to state against Paul when he sent him to Caesar!

As he stated, it would indeed seem strange to send a prisoner to the emperor when there were not even any charges against him. So, he wanted advice from Agrippa and the other men present to tell him what he should write when he sent Paul to Caesar.

McGarvey observes that Festus put himself in this predicament because he failed to act on principle and justice. The Jews, though evil and corrupt, had strong convictions that Paul should die. An honest man, strongly seeking justice, could easily see that Paul was innocent and should have been released. Festus had already admitted Paul's innocence. But Festus had a problem because he lacked real conviction. He

acted, not according to right and wrong, but according to practicality and what might seem to further his own personal benefit.

So began Paul's opportunity to present the gospel to this great gathering.

Acts 26

26:1-32 - Paul's speech to Agrippa

26:1-3 – Paul was glad to answer because he knew Agrippa was an expert in the laws and customs of the Jews.

When Paul had arrived before this great assembly, Agrippa asked no specific questions but allowed Paul to simply speak for himself as he chose. Paul beckoned or motioned with his hand and gave his statement.

He began by stating his willingness to openly answer the accusations made against him by the Jews. He was especially happy to speak before Agrippa because he knew Agrippa was well informed regarding Jewish customs and issues. The Romans, before whom Paul had been defending himself, were unable to appreciate the religious motivations of the Jews who had opposed Paul's work. They saw everything from the viewpoint of civil law, especially from the view of advantage or disadvantage to the Empire. If Agrippa was a fair judge, his knowledge of the Jewish way of thinking would be to Paul's advantage.

The fact he was speaking to one who knew Jewish thinking doubtless also affected Paul's approach. When addressing the Jews in Jerusalem, he tried to persuade them by telling them about his conversion. But when talking before the Roman governors, he had raised no such issues but had stayed on legal issues knowing that was all that concerned them. Now speaking to one of Jewish background, Paul again returned to his conversion and the consequences for a Jew such as he had been. Such an approach ought to show Agrippa that the issues between Paul and the Jews were entirely religious in nature, having nothing whatever to do with any civil crime that would concern the Romans. And it would also enable Paul to attempt to teach Agrippa the truth.

26:4-7 – Paul had served God earnestly as a Pharisee.

As he did in Acts 22:1ff, Paul began by describing his Jewish background, using that to lead into his conversion (see notes on Acts 22 and Acts 9). He described how he had lived from youth as a Pharisee, the strictest Jewish sect. He said the Jews knew this to be true of his background, if they were willing to admit it.

Paul again claimed, as he had repeatedly, that he was really on trial because he believed in and followed the true hope that all Israel ought to share in. It was the very promise made to the fathers (patriarchs), which hope the twelve tribes of Israel sought.

Paul had found the fulfillment of the cherished Jewish hopes! The Jews were seeking it, but Paul had found it. Yet when he tried to tell them about it, they rejected it! This hope included the coming of the Messiah who was the promised blessing on all nations through Abraham's seed. This was proved by the resurrection (v8; 23:6; 24:15).

26:8 – Paul then asked why it was so hard for people to believe in the resurrection of the dead.

Note that Paul emphasized the resurrection from the beginning of the speech because that was the basic proof he planned to offer. He intended to show them that he himself had seen Jesus alive from the dead, and that was what convinced him to believe in Jesus. They needed to reach the same conclusion he had, and that conclusion would be based on the resurrection. Having introduced the resurrection, Paul proceeded to describe the time when he saw Jesus alive though He had been dead.

Paul had earlier claimed that his belief in the resurrection was the focal point of controversy between himself and other Jews (23:6). So, the issue was fundamentally a religious one. Many Jews claimed to believe there would be a resurrection, though some denied it. Paul was saying it was a reality. The very thing many of them thought God could and would do, Paul was teaching had really occurred. Then they disbelieved and argued with him!

26:9 – Paul had once sincerely opposed Jesus.

Having stated his Jewish background, Paul then described how he had opposed the gospel of Jesus, persecuting believers (see notes on Acts 8,9,22). As a Jew, Paul had been convinced Jesus was not from God and should be opposed, just as the Jews were opposing Paul himself in his work now that he had become a Christian.

Paul affirmed that he really thought within himself that opposing Jesus is what he ***ought*** to do. He had not just occasionally opposed Jesus a little bit. He was sincerely convicted this was what ought to be done. He later realized that he had been wrong, but his statement showed the Jewish people that his opposition to the gospel had been sincere. They could not explain away his conversion on the grounds that he never really was a convicted Jew to begin with. And the very fact that such a devoted opponent of the gospel was converted, ought to lead the audience to wonder what brought about such a change.

Note that Paul is a case study proving it is not enough to be sincerely religious. Some people teach that all sincere religious people will be saved, no matter what they believe. Paul was sincerely religious, but he was dead wrong. He later realized he had been the "chief of sinners" (1 Timothy 1:13-15; compare notes on Acts 23:1). It is possible to be sincerely wrong. Sincerity is needed, but it is not enough. One must also have the truth.

26:10,11 – He had imprisoned Christians, voted for them to die, and persecuted them even to distant cities.

In Jerusalem he had imprisoned many Christians, acting by the authority of the chief priests themselves. Some Christians were killed, and he gave his vote for those deaths.

This shows, perhaps more fully than other accounts, how deeply Paul was really involved in this. It was not just Stephen that he favored killing (Acts 8:1), but other people as well. He even went to synagogues and went to other cities elsewhere besides Jerusalem to capture them.

Part of his effort involved making them blaspheme. Blasphemy was the grounds on which the Jews had killed Jesus, because He claimed to be the Son of God. Perhaps this was the approach Paul used to convict Christians. If he could compel them to admit that they believed Jesus was the Son of God, that would be blasphemy in the Jews' view. The only problem with this was the same one involved when they condemned Jesus: if the claim was **true**, then there would be no blasphemy!

Another possible explanation is that Paul tried to get these people to deny Jesus, offering them their freedom if they would. Many would not deny Jesus, and these were then put to death.

26:12,13 – When he traveled to Damascus, a light brighter than the noon-day sun shone around him.

Paul proceeded to describe his trip to Damascus to capture Christians, which event led to his conversion. Again, see other details in Acts 9 & 22. This trip too was authorized by the chief priests.

He saw a light at midday, brighter than the sun. Note that this was not the middle of the night so that any bright light could be mistaken for something other than what it was. The very fact the light was brighter than the noon sun would be a miracle of itself. This was no hallucination. Paul was giving genuine eyewitness testimony to convince honest people they needed to believe in Jesus. This was his role as an apostle to tell what he had seen.

26:14-16 – Jesus spoke, saying He had appeared to make Paul a minister and a witness of the things he had seen.

Paul and the others with him fell to the earth and a voice asked why Saul was persecuting Him. He said it is hard to kick against the goads (see notes on Acts 9). Paul asked who was speaking, and the speaker identified Himself as Jesus. This account adds that Jesus spoke in Hebrew.

Then Jesus explained the purpose of His appearance to Paul. Note that Jesus plainly said He had appeared to Paul and that He had a reason for doing so. It was not just to convert Paul but to make Him a minister (he would serve others by means of preaching) and a witness of what he had seen. This was necessary to qualify Paul as an apostle. In Acts 22:14,15, Ananias had explained this when he spoke to Paul. But Acts 26

is the only account that says that Jesus Himself explained this to Paul. Jesus said there was also more yet to be revealed.

In telling this story to Agrippa, Paul was doing the very thing Jesus had told him to do: he was bearing witness of what he had seen. This was his duty as an apostle.

26:17,18 – Paul would turn Jews and Gentiles from Satan to God so they may receive forgiveness of sins.

Paul's ministry would require him to be sent to Gentiles as well as Jews (see notes on 22:21), but they would persecute him and he would need deliverance. Jesus promised to give this deliverance.

But the purpose of his preaching was to turn the eyes of the people from darkness to light (i.e., from error to truth) and from Satan's power to God's. This is a description of conversion. This would be necessary so they could receive forgiveness and an inheritance among those who are sanctified.

Note that hearing the inspired testimony of the gospel is necessary so people can believe and have the eternal inheritance. Men will not be saved by direct revelations but by the testimony of apostles and the teaching of inspired men (which for us is found in the Bible). This testimony has the power to turn men from sin and error to truth and light.

The inheritance of Christians is in heaven (1 Peter 1:3,4; Acts 20:32). We receive this inheritance only if we have faith in Jesus according to the word of the inspired men.

“Sanctification” refers to holiness – being set apart or dedicated to God's service. This is necessary to have the eternal inheritance, and it comes by faith (not “faith only,” but obedient faith).

In short, Paul's preaching and testimony would lead lost souls to eternal salvation through Jesus.

26:19,20 – So Paul proclaimed that people should repent, turn to God, and do works fitting for repentance.

In this vision of Jesus, Paul had been given a job to do. He then explained to Agrippa that he did not disobey the instructions, and that is why he was preaching and teaching as he was. This was not something he dreamed up himself, nor was it just something that he had been convinced of because of weak, flimsy evidence. He had convincing evidence and was compelled by that evidence to preach and teach as he had.

So he had begun to preach Jesus in Damascus, where he had been converted. He had also preached in Jerusalem and the area of Judea, and he had preached to Gentiles as Jesus had said he would.

His message was that men should repent, turn to God (conversion), and do works fitting to repentance (compare 2:38; 3:19; 17:30 and notes there). Repentance requires a person to admit he has been wrong and to be willing to change and do God's will.

Many people want the forgiveness God offers, but do not bring forth the fruits of repentance. It is not enough to say we are sorry and that we intend to change. Some are content to say that over and over. God requires us to follow through and do the changing that repentance requires. Repentance involves making a commitment to change, but God holds us to that commitment and expects us to truly make the changes. We must overcome our old bad habits and develop new good ones as the Bible requires. We must not continue in our old ways (see Luke 3:8-14; Ezekiel 18 & 33; Philemon; Colossians 3; Ephesians 4:17ff; etc.).

26:21 – Paul was simply fulfilling this ministry when the Jews seized him.

Paul claimed that the spiritual message he preached, as Jesus had commanded him to do, was the real reason why the Jews seized him in the temple and tried to kill him. The reasons they had given the Romans were trumped up charges designed to try to sway the Romans. Romans would have difficulty understanding the real religious motivations involved, and would not care about them anyway; so the Jews did not offer their real reasons. But a person of Jewish background like Agrippa would understand, so Paul explained it to him.

26:22,23 – So Paul preached the fulfillment of prophecy that Christ should suffer and rise from the dead.

Despite Jewish opposition, God had helped Paul continue his work so he could spread his testimony regarding Jesus. This message did not oppose anything taught by Moses and the Old Testament prophets, but completely agreed with what they had said would happen. His message fulfilled their prophecies.

Specifically, they had predicted that the Christ must suffer and rise from the dead and that his message would give light (the enlightenment of truth and salvation) to Gentiles as well as Jews. Now the Jews had never believed this was the purpose of the Messiah, and that was one reason why they opposed Paul. Nevertheless, his message agreed with what their Scriptures really taught (see notes on Acts 3; etc.). And interestingly, just like the Jews, premillennial folks today still dispute that most of this was prophesied. But it was prophesied, and here Paul proclaims it.

In what sense was Jesus the “first” to rise from the dead? Other people had surely died and come back to life. Some were raised in the Old Testament and Jesus Himself raised some. But He was the first to rise never to die again, even as He Himself will raise many when He returns. (Some translations connect “first” to giving light, rather than to the resurrection.)

26:24 – Festus concluded much learning made Paul mad.

As Paul spoke, Festus loudly interrupted saying that Paul was so educated it had affected his sanity! Apparently, the discussion of the resurrection was what led Festus to that conclusion, though he may also have been affected by the great sacrifice Paul had made in giving up his former life. Interestingly, Paul's presentation was intelligent enough that Festus recognized it as educated.

People who do not want the truth will always find a way to reject it and, in the process, dismiss the messenger as unworthy of respect. If the preacher is uneducated, some will reject the message saying the man does not have "credentials" (Acts 4:13). But if the preacher is obviously educated, some will say he is so educated he has gone crazy! Others will say he is trusting in his own education or thinks he is smarter than others. So, we are condemned if we do and condemned if we don't! People who don't want truth will always find an excuse to reject the evidence.

26:25,26 – Paul said that his message was both truthful and substantiated by evidence.

We can find great value in Paul's statement that the events regarding Jesus were not done in a corner. It shows that knowledge of Jesus and His work was widespread. This, in turn, would give the enemies of the gospel much opportunity to find evidence against the gospel, if in fact such evidence existed. Why didn't the Jews present evidence against the resurrection of Jesus? The apostles repeatedly publicly preached it. The facts surrounding Jesus' death were well known. So why didn't Jews produce evidence that would contradict the resurrection? The clear conclusion is that they did not disprove it because they could not.

Despite Festus' abrupt insult, Paul responded respectfully by denying that he was insane. He affirmed that he was speaking reasonable truth. Further, he claimed that King Agrippa knew enough Jewish prophecy and history to know that what he had said made sense. In particular, the events concerning Jesus and His disciples were known widely (not done in a corner). Paul affirmed that the king had heard of these things and would know enough from other sources that would make Paul's testimony reasonable. Agrippa's father had killed James; his grandfather had killed the Babes of Bethlehem to kill Jesus. So, Agrippa himself must have had some knowledge about Jesus and Christians.

Again, this shows the difference between teaching Jews and teaching Romans, who knew little Jewish history. With Jews there was much more background information that could be drawn on for evidence.

26:27 – Paul asked Agrippa if he believed in the prophets.

Having stated his case and affirmed that Jesus had been raised, Paul directly asked Agrippa about his faith. He first asked if Agrippa believed the prophets, then he affirmed that he knew Agrippa did believe. If Agrippa knew and believed the Old Testament prophets, then he should

be able to understand Paul's argument that Jesus had fulfilled those prophecies. That was where the discussion was leading, and Agrippa evidently realized it.

Note that Paul did not, even so, discuss baptism. There was no point in that until there was assurance of faith. Commitment regarding Jesus was needed, and Paul was willing to ask for it. We should do the same.

26:28 – “You almost persuade me to become a Christian.”

Agrippa responded by saying Paul almost persuaded him to be a Christian. It is apparent that, like Felix, he did not end up obeying. He was another example of non-conversion. Yet he was close. How many people have been taught the truth and almost obeyed, but failed! How tragic!

There is some dispute, however, about the exact meaning of Agrippa's answer. It is translated, “With but little persuasion thou wouldest fain make me a Christian” (ASV). Or “In a little time...” (ASV ftnt). Some claim this means Agrippa was saying Paul was going too fast for him. He was trying to convert Agrippa in just a short time, and was assuming Agrippa could be convinced on the basis of very little persuasion. Perhaps Agrippa's statement was even sarcastic. On the other hand, even these translations could just as easily be taken to mean that, with just a little more persuasion or time, Agrippa might be convinced, in which case he was almost persuaded to be a Christian as in the KJV.

It seems that the translation itself may be somewhat uncertain, but the context helps. Paul had already said that he knew Agrippa believed the prophets. Surely Paul's statements were not sarcasm or humor. Paul's response in v29 also is serious and implies hope for Agrippa's conversion. Agrippa's own statements later about Paul seem favorable (verses 30-32). All this seems to me to indicate that Agrippa was seriously saying he was close to conversion. However, we have no record that he ever obeyed.

Note that here we have the second recorded instance of the word “Christian” (compare Acts 11:26).

26:29 – Paul expressed his hope for the conversion of all in the audience.

Paul concluded his defense by affirming that he desired Agrippa and all who heard him to become just as he himself was religiously, except for the fact he was in bonds. He wished they would be, not just almost, but altogether convinced. Or as in the ASV, whether it took little or much, he wanted them to be persuaded.

Note that Jesus had predicted Paul would bear his name before kings (9:15). Here this prediction was fulfilled.

Note also that Paul was on trial for his life, yet he repeatedly used his opportunities to defend himself as opportunities to present the gospel. Instead of backing off and compromising or keeping quiet, he tried to convert his judges!

26:30-32 – The rulers concluded that Paul had done nothing worthy of bonds.

This ended the hearing. The king, governor, Bernice, and all that sat with them arose to leave. As they talked among themselves, they agreed that Paul had done nothing deserving of death or chains. Agrippa went so far as to say Paul might have been freed had he not appealed to Caesar.

This is the third ruler who had affirmed Paul's innocence (compare 23:29; 25:25). As in Jesus' case, the rulers knew he was innocent but did not free him because of the desires of the Jews.

Acts 27

Paul's Journey to Rome and Imprisonment There — Chaps. 27,28

27:1-8 - Beginning the Journey

Students have remarked on the special character of Luke's record here. On the one hand, it is not written in technical language, such as would have been written by a sailor. On the other hand, it is so accurate that it must have been written by an eyewitness. These facts help confirm that the account is a true and accurate eyewitness account. This also serves to confirm Luke's accuracy as a historian. (See Stringer.)

27:1,2 – Paul and company set sail for Italy.

Paul had appealed his case to Caesar, and Jesus had assured him that he would go to Rome (23:11). The time finally arrived for the journey to begin, and the authorities determined to send him to Italy by ship. Other prisoners were also included, and all were put under the guard of a centurion named Julius of the Augustan regiment. Presumably, Julius' 100 soldiers went along to guard the prisoners.

Note that the author says "we," so Luke accompanied Paul. Also, a man named Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was along (see 19:29). The Romans had given Paul freedom to have his friends with him (24:23), so it is possible that these men were not prisoners but simply accompanied Paul to support and care for him. However, an Aristarchus is listed as one of Paul's fellow-prisoners in Colossians 4:10. Paul continued to receive favorable treatment throughout the journey.

The journey began in a ship from Adramyttium, a city near Troas in western Asia Minor. The ship was destined for places in Asia where, presumably, the centurion intended to find another ship to sail on to Rome (see verse 6).

27:3-5 – The journey included Sidon, Cyprus, then Myra.

The ship first sailed up the coast from Caesarea to Sidon (see *map*). The treatment given Paul was so kind that he was allowed to visit friends and be refreshed (compare 24:23 and notes on verses 1,2). Luke did not

explain why Paul was given such special treatment. It may have been because he was well known. But it is also possible that the authorities had informed Julius to treat Paul well, reminding him that he was a Roman (which many other prisoners may not have been) and that there was every reason to believe he was innocent. Doubtless his helpful manner toward all would also gain the confidence of his jailers.

From there the ship sailed past the island of Cyprus (see *map*) on the lee side because the wind was contrary. Next, they sailed past the regions of Cilicia and Pamphylia to Myra, a city of the region of Lycia (see *map*).

27:6-8 – At Myra the centurion booked passage on an Alexandrian ship headed toward Italy.

McGarvey points out, based on the later reference to the cargo, that this was one of the many ships that transported grain across the sea (verse 38). Apparently, it was a fairly large ship – though not one of the largest ones – since it held 276 people (many of them passengers) in addition to the cargo (verse 37).

Alexandria was an Egyptian city (see *map*). Again, the winds were contrary, so they sailed past Cnidus in southwestern Asia Minor (see *map*). Then they turned south and passed on the lee side of the island of Crete, passing near Salmone (see *map*). Finally, they landed at Fair Havens on the south side of Crete near a city named Lasea (see *map*).

27:9-44 - Storm and Shipwreck

27:9,10 – Paul advised against sailing further at that season.

It was then late in the sailing season, and weather was so bad that traveling was dangerous. It was after the time of the “Fast,” apparently meaning the Jewish Day of Atonement. This would make it sometime in September or October.

At this point Paul warned the party that it would be dangerous to continue the journey and would result in the loss of cargo and life. Apparently, the passengers were asked their opinion (v12), and Paul expressed here an uninspired view. He was an experienced sea traveler, perhaps especially so compared to the soldiers. Nothing says this was a revelation from God, but later Paul received a specific revelation saying the same except that there would be no loss of life. Another possibility, however, is that this was a revelation from God, but God later changed the outcome in response to Paul’s intercessory prayers (compare v24 to Genesis 18; 2 Kings 20:1-11).

27:11,12 – Despite Paul’s warning, the voyage continued.

The owner of the ship disagreed, however, and he, together with the helmsman, persuaded the centurion to travel on. They reasoned that the

harbor was not suitable to winter in, so the majority of the people advised to try to reach a better harbor at Phoenix and spend the winter there (see *map*).

The centurion, having taken charge of the ship for official Empire business, apparently was in charge of final decisions. Though he had been kind to Paul, one could hardly expect him to take Paul's word for sailing conditions over the advice of seasoned sailors.

Phoenix was a harbor more suitable for wintering. Luke said it opened toward the southwest and northwest. This apparently means the bay had some protection in the form of land to the west, so there were openings that ships could access the bay from the northwest or the southwest. Such a situation would protect ships from winds from the west.

27:13,14 – A storm named Euroclydon struck the ship.

A soft south wind blew, and they thought this was just what they were looking for, so they put out to sea. They sailed close to the island, but before they could reach the desired harbor, they were overtaken by a tempestuous wind named Euroclydon (or Euraquilo, which means "Northeaster").

We today sometimes name hurricanes and sea storms, so this storm had a name. Some commentators believe this was a common storm pattern, named because it was observed frequently. Obviously it blew from east to west, since that is the direction it blew the ship.

27:15-17 – All the sailors could do was to take precautions and let the ship drive.

The ship was caught in the wind and could not withstand it to go where the sailors wanted, so they let the wind drive the ship. They managed to pass under the lee side of an island named Claudia (see *map*). There they were able to take some safety precautions.

They secured the boat, evidently meaning a small rowboat that was carried along to pass from ship to shore. They apparently had been towing it behind, so they brought it aboard to keep it safe so it would not be destroyed by the violence of the storm. Even this seemingly simple task was accomplished only with difficulty.

They also undergirded the ship. This probably consisted of running cables around underneath the ship and securing them to the deck, to strengthen the hull.

Then they cast off because they were afraid the storm would cast them on the Syrtis sands or quicksands off the coast of northern Africa. But they lowered the gear or sails, so as not to go too fast, and let the wind drive them.

27:18-20 – They were driven many days till they lost hope of being saved.

The wind was so bad that the ship was exceedingly tossed. In short, it was a terrible storm. To fight the effects of the wind and to keep the ship afloat, they began to throw out whatever they could to lighten the ship. Eventually they even threw out the tackling (furniture – ASV footnote). However, v38 implies that not all the cargo was cast overboard at this time. It is also unlikely that they threw out tackling that would be essential to navigating the ship (compare v40).

In this way they proceeded for many days, the weather so bad that they could not see the sun or the stars. In those days, this meant they had no way to navigate or to know where they were. So they gave up hope of being saved.

27:21-24 – Paul encouraged them that, though they would lose the ship, yet no one would die.

As this continued, the people were going without food. Finally, Paul stood up and reminded them that they should have listened to him and stayed in Crete. Probably he did not say this to “rub in it” and say, “I told you so.” More likely he hoped this would motivate them to realize they should listen to what he had to say now.

He then encouraged them to cheer up because, though the ship would be lost, there would be no loss of life. He affirmed that an angel had appeared to him to give him this information. He said that Paul would still appear before Caesar, and God had determined to spare everyone with him on the ship. God had previously said Paul would go to Rome (compare 23:11), so his life must be spared. But here God promised to spare the others too. Normally the prediction of the loss of the ship would be a great tragedy, but in this case it was a small thing compared to what could have happened. This prediction was not speculation or human opinion but an express prediction by God through an angel.

Note that Paul described God as the God he belonged to. This should also be our attitude.

The expression “God has granted you” may imply that this outcome was an answer to prayers Paul had offered. In any case, it is clear that all people – the prisoners, soldiers, sailors, and others who did not serve God – were blessed by the presence of a servant of God. Some worldly people resent even being around Christians, but often the presence of God’s people is what motivates God to protect others even who do not serve Him. This is unappreciated today.

27:25,26 – Finally, Paul predicted they would shipwreck on an island.

Paul had confidence that this prediction would come true, because he believed that God’s word would always come true. Nevertheless, he warned them that they would run aground on an island. Surely in such

bleak conditions, great faith would be required to confidently affirm such a prediction.

Like other prophecies, this one would serve to give the unbelievers reason to believe in the true God whom Paul worshiped. It gave them confidence in the meanwhile; but later when it came true, it would also give them reason to believe.

27:27-29 – The sailors realize they were drawing near land.

About midnight on the fourteenth night of this storm, the ship was being driven about in the Adriatic Sea (the portion of the Mediterranean Sea between Italy and Greece, extending some distance south into the Mediterranean). The sailors determined they were drawing near to land (perhaps by hearing breakers on the shore or some other indications). So, they took soundings and determined that the water was becoming shallower as they progressed. At first the depth was 20 fathoms or about 120 feet, a fathom being about six feet. On next sounding it was 15 fathoms or 90 feet.

This implied that they were approaching land, so they dropped four anchors from the stern because they feared otherwise they would be driven onto rocks. So they waited for daylight, when they would be able to see their circumstances better so they could deal with them as well as possible.

27:30-32 – Sailors planned unsuccessfully to leave the ship.

The sailors then determined to abandon the ship and seek to go ashore in the little boat, pretending that they were going to put out other anchors. Paul warned the soldiers, however, that if the sailors were allowed to leave, the rest of them would perish (presumably because they did not know how to handle the ship). So the soldiers cut the ropes of the little boat so it fell away into the sea. Note how, by this time, the soldiers were taking seriously the warnings Paul gave.

McGarvey and others point out how this incident perfectly illustrates the relationship between Divine promises, foreknowledge, and human free will. Though God may promise to give some blessing in answer to prayer, yet people must accept responsibility to do what they can to receive it. God had definitely predicted that the ship would be lost but all people on it would be saved. The plot of these sailors would have defeated that prediction, since those left could not navigate the boat. So Paul warned that, if the sailors left, the others could not be saved, which meant God's prediction would not come true. So, the actions of Paul and the soldiers were necessary to bring about the fulfillment of God promise. They acted by free moral agency or choice, but God had foreknown what would happen and what their choice would be, so His prediction came true.

Likewise, God may promise to answer our prayers or to offer us salvation from sin, etc. These blessings still require us to do what we can to

bring about what is promised. We must obey God's commands to be forgiven, work to accomplish what we prayed for, etc. God's promises do not negate man's power of free will and choice, but take man's choices into account.

27:33-35 – Paul urged the people to break their fast.

As dawn drew near, Paul encouraged the men to eat. They had been fasting or going without food for fourteen days. Paul said they needed food to survive, so he urged them to eat. He promised further than none of them would be hurt. Paul himself then set the example and ate a meal, after he had given thanks to God. Some commentators point out that it is unlikely that the men had eaten absolutely no food for fourteen days. It may simply be an exaggerated way of expressing that they had taken no real, regular meals, but had simply grabbed what they could through the day. In any case, the men themselves, whom Paul addressed, would have understood his meaning exactly. Note again that the fulfillment of God's prediction would require the effort and cooperation of these men.

And note also that giving thanks before eating was generally practiced by Jesus and His disciples (compare Matthew 14:19; 15:36). It is a good time to remember God's blessings. Especially at this time these men needed God's help. Also notice that prayer in public, even in the presence of unbelievers, is not wrong but beneficial.

27:36-38 – The men ate and prepared for the dawn.

The men were encouraged by Paul's speech and example, so they also ate. Notice their increasing confidence in what Paul said. People were seeing the truth of his words. The fact they were close to land would also encourage them after the hardships they had faced. It is amazing to consider that a **prisoner** could have such inspiring influence and be allowed such leadership.

For the first time we are told the number of people on board: a total of 276. This would include the centurion and his 100 soldiers, the sailors, prisoners, and perhaps other passengers. This was a great number of people in danger, so it is amazing that Paul would confidently affirm they would all survive.

When the people had eaten all they needed, they further lightened the boat by throwing out the wheat into the sea. Lightening the ship would cause it to ride higher in the water, perhaps enabling it to pass over rocks or reefs on which it might otherwise run aground (compare verses 18,19).

27:39,40 – When they had light to see, they tried to run the ship onto the beach.

When daylight arrived, they did not recognize the shore as being anyplace they knew. However, they saw a bay with a beach, so they determined to run the ship aground there, if possible. Note that, at this

point they were not even trying to save the ship. They just wanted to escape with their lives (the very thing Paul had predicted).

They released the anchors, leaving them in the sea (rather than raising them and increasing the weight of the ship). They loosened the rudder ropes, raised the mainsail, and made for shore.

Note: Coffman discusses the technical accuracy of Luke's account, which implies plural rudders. History has confirmed that ships of that time often did have twin rudders. In severe storms, the rudders were of little value, so they were tied up out of the water to avoid damage. In this case, the sailors let them down again so they could try to steer the ship.

27:41 – The ship became grounded and began to break up.

Before they reached the shore, however, the ship encountered a place where two seas met – i.e., probably meaning that waves from different directions came together. There the ship ran aground (though obviously they had not yet reached the shore). The front of the ship stuck fast in the ground, so the ship could not be moved. However, the waves were still beating the stern of the ship, breaking it up.

27:42-44 – All arrived safely on land.

Seeing that they would have to swim for land, the soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from escaping. This was cruel and somewhat disgusting. Paul had just saved these soldiers' lives, and now they wanted to take his! But remember the soldiers themselves were subject to lose their lives if the prisoners escaped. However, the centurion had become very favorable to Paul and did not want him killed, so he used his authority to prevent the soldiers' purpose.

Instead, all were told to make for the shore. Those who could swim were to jump overboard. Then the others took boards or other parts of the ship to buoy them so they could float to land. In this way, all escaped safely to the land.

What a fascinating story – good literature regardless of the religious lessons. Yet there are numerous good lessons to be learned.

1) God's promises had been kept and His prophecies had come true. He had promised Paul he would go to Rome and that the others on the ship would be spared, though the ship would be lost. This is exactly as it happened. This proves again that God has the power to know everything, including the future. The fact that Paul could so predict the future proved that God was with him. This is the purpose of prophecy.

2) We also see God's providence at work. Except for the prophetic predictions, there was nothing miraculous or impossible by natural law in this story. All things could happen by natural law. Yet in this case we know it happened by the intervention of God, for He had told Paul it would be so. God has so designed His universe that He has the power to control events here to bring about His purposes, especially for the good

of His people. That is a definition of providence, and this is an excellent example of providence at work.

Furthermore, we see that, though God had promised this outcome, the people involved had to work to help bring it about. His promises do not remove our responsibility to work. Rather they require us to work, while revealing us the manner in which we are to work.

Acts 28

28:1-10 - Events on the Island of Malta

28:1,2 – The island on which they had landed was Malta.

The people all escaped safely to land, but previously they had not known what land it was. When they arrived, they learned that it was the island of Malta or Melita, just south of Sicily (see *map*).

The natives were quite kind to those from the shipwreck. Luke calls them natives (or barbarians – ASV), but this does not mean they were cruel or uncivilized. They simply were native to that island and were not greatly involved in Greek or Roman culture.

Actually, they were very kind and helpful. People naturally sympathize with people who have suffered shipwreck. These people made a fire and welcomed the strangers, because it was cold and raining as a consequence of the storm.

28:3,4 – When Paul was bitten by a viper, the natives concluded he was suffering for his crimes.

As Paul was helping gather wood for the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand. The people saw it and, perhaps knowing he was a prisoner, concluded that he was guilty of some severe crime such as murder, so fate was determined to punish him. He had managed to escape the storm, but justice would still punish him by means of the viper.

In reality, of course, God had spared Paul from the storm by His providence and would also spare him from this attack. He had promised Paul would go to Rome, and that promise would not be defeated by an animal.

This shows the futility of the superstitious attempts of people to interpret events as omens. These people were obviously superstitious; yet many people today, in our supposedly enlightened society, are just as superstitious. Sometimes “religious people” are among the worst. They interpret good events as indications that they are in God’s favor, and bad events as signs God is displeased with them.

However, it simply is not true in this life that bad things happen only to bad people and good things only to good people. This was also the theory of Job’s friends, but it is false. Often good people suffer more in this life than evil people, and evil people may be blessed physically above good people. Our ultimate rewards from God come after this life, not during it. Events here are not intended to reveal God’s will to us.

True, some events are blessings from God, but you cannot read His will or favor by observing signs.

This experience would have been frightful for anyone, but Luke tells it calmly and factually, showing that his intent was not to be sensational. Had some modern faith healer done what Paul was about to do, he would have shouted it from the housetop.

Also note that Paul, as an apostle and preacher, did not consider himself above menial labor. He was working to bring wood for the fire just like everyone else. Some preachers and religious leaders seem to think they are too good to do menial tasks. We must maintain our priorities on the most important work, but when work needs to be done and we are available, we should be willing to do our part.

Some have claimed this could not have been a poisonous viper, since vipers bite but do not normally fasten onto their victims. However, the people of the island surely knew best about the snakes on their island, and they expected Paul to drop dead from the bite (v6). Whatever the reason why the snake fastened on Paul's hand, it was definitely a poisonous snake and it definitely did bite Paul. By fastening on Paul's hand, it proved beyond doubt that it had bitten Paul and that it had plenty of opportunity to inject its venom into him. No one who saw the event doubted what had happened. The only people who doubt the record are the skeptics who were not there and refuse to admit the accuracy of Scripture.

28:5,6 – When God miraculously spared Paul's life, the people concluded that he was a god.

Despite the obvious threat to his life, Paul shook the viper off into the fire and was not in any way harmed. This miracle is an express fulfillment of Mark 16:18. However, Paul did not deliberately choose to handle a viper to prove his power, like some modern snake-handling faith healers. The situation occurred by the course of nature; but God protected Paul and, in so doing, worked a great miracle to teach the people.

The people of the island expected Paul to swell up from the bite and drop dead. But when they saw he was not harmed as they expected, they changed their minds and concluded he was a god. Like the heathen in Acts 14:11, they swung from one extreme to another. Their first judgment was wrong, and so was their second. They failed to consider that Paul could have power granted him by God without himself being a god.

Paul had apparently done no miracle on the voyage (other than prophesying the future). However, here he began a series of miracles that proved his inspiration to the islanders and his fellow travelers.

One sidelight to notice is that Paul had no objection to killing the viper. Modern animal rights activists would call this cruelty to animals.

However, the animal had attacked Paul. Though he possessed miraculous power to prevent his being harmed by it, yet there was no wrong in killing the animal.

28:7,8 – Paul healed the father of Publius.

The ship had wrecked close to the property of the chief man of the island, named Publius. This man was very generous and hospitable to the unfortunate people, and entertained them with courtesy for three days. This was doubtless quite a feat considering the great number of them (though it is possible the term “us” refers only to Paul’s company, since the people obviously thought him so special).

However, Publius’ father was sick from fever and dysentery (inflammation of the bowels resulting in hemorrhaging, etc.). Paul went in to him, laid hands on him, prayed, and healed him.

This event had the characteristics of all Bible miraculous healings. It was clear the man was sick and clear that he was healed in a way impossible by natural law. The purpose was to provide evidence that the man through whom the miracle occurred was from God, so the people would believe his message.

28:9,10 – Paul then healed others of their diseases.

Other people from the island then brought their sick people, and Paul was enabled to heal them also. As a result, many honors were given to the visitors; and when they left the island, they were provided what they needed by the islanders.

We are not told whether or not these events resulted in conversions and establishment of a church among these islanders. Nevertheless, an opportunity to teach clearly was provided and Paul used it. The islanders were kind and friendly to those who had been shipwrecked, yet they themselves received even greater blessings as a result the shipwreck.

28:11-16 - The Journey from Malta to Rome

28:11,12 – The company left the island on a ship that had wintered there.

Having spent three months on the island, the company finally was enabled to leave on a ship that had wintered there. It was also a ship from Alexandria, and its figurehead or symbol was “The Twin Brothers.” Others translate this as “Castor and Pollux,” twin sons of Zeus in Greek mythology.

Having left Malta, they sailed first to Syracuse, a city on the east coast of Sicily (see *map*). They spent three days there.

28:13,14 – The journey continued to Rhegium and Puteoli.

They sailed from there to Rhegium on the southern coast of Italy (see *map*). Then a wind from the south blew. This is the first mention of a favorable wind on the whole journey!

This took them the next day to Puteoli, on the west coast of Italy (see *map*). Here they found Christians and stayed with them seven days. It is almost incredible that Christians were found nearly everywhere they journeyed. We are not told who established the church here, but we do know that churches already existed in Italy since Paul had earlier written a letter to the saints in Rome.

Apparently, Paul's company (presumably including soldiers as guards – perhaps even all the prisoners and soldiers – see verse 16) here disembarked and went on by land.

28:15,16 – Having arrived at Rome, Paul was granted house arrest.

Brethren in Rome heard that Paul was about to arrive, so they went south to meet Paul as he traveled. They met at Appii Forum and Three Inns. These are two separate places, so presumably two groups had set forth and met the company at two different places. A forum was a kind of marketplace. These places were located on the famous road called the Appian Way.

On seeing the brethren, Paul was encouraged and gave thanks to God. Paul had shown great courage and faith throughout a very trying and dangerous journey, yet he was human and needed encouragement too. This demonstrates the blessing Christians can provide for one another just by showing how they care. Often people are discouraged by their circumstances, and just knowing that brethren care can be a major help.

On entering Rome itself, Paul and the other prisoners were delivered to the captain of the guard. But Paul was granted special privileges and was allowed to live by himself guarded only by a soldier. This was exceptionally good treatment for a prisoner. Yet by rights he should not have been a prisoner at all, but should have been set free. This treatment may have resulted from the information in Festus' letter and from the favorable report that the centurion Julius would have given for Paul's conduct on the trip.

So, in a way completely unexpected by Paul, God kept His promise that Paul would visit Rome. And Paul was enabled to fulfill his long-held desire to visit the capital city of the empire and encourage the Christians there.

28:17-31 - Study with the Jews in Rome

28:17,18 – Paul called the leaders of the Roman Jews to meet with him so he could explain his case.

Paul had been imprisoned at the demand of Jews in Jerusalem who made accusations against him. As a result of those charges, he had been taken to Rome as a prisoner. Not knowing what the Jews in Rome thought about him or the charges against him, he decided to take the

initiative and contact them. He hoped also, no doubt, to get an opportunity to teach. His approach in every city had been to attempt first to teach the local Jewish population; but in this case they had to come to him since he could not go to the synagogue.

So, three days after his arrival, he called the Jews to him to tell them his side of the story. He affirmed repeatedly that he had done nothing to hurt the people or to violate Jewish customs. Yet he was given to the Romans as a prisoner. Further, he affirmed that the Romans, on examining his case and hearing the Jews' accusations, found nothing in him worthy of death.

Note that there is often value, in a case of conflict or potential conflict, to take the initiative and contact those who might oppose your position. By talking to them directly, you get the chance to tell them your side of the story, perhaps even before their minds have been prejudiced by false accusations. You may be able to make a favorable impression and even have a chance to teach the truth.

28:19,20 – Paul said he was not in Rome to make accusation against the Jews.

He had nothing against the Jewish nation, as such. That was not why he had come to Rome. However, when the Jews pressed charges against him, he had appealed to Caesar for his own defense.

He had called for these Jewish leaders, he said, because he wanted to talk to them about the situation, and let them know that it was because of the hope of Israel he had been imprisoned. What he believed and taught was the fulfillment of the Jewish hopes. He was not an enemy of his nation nor doing anything that would hurt them, but rather that would fulfill their goals. Yet for this he had been imprisoned because of Jews themselves.

28:21,22 – The Roman Jews wanted to hear about Paul's teachings.

These leaders responded that they had heard nothing about Paul's case from the Jews in Jerusalem, neither by letter nor by any evil report. However, they were interested in hearing Paul's views because they knew Jews everywhere spoke against this "sect."

Jesus had predicted His people would be spoken against. We have seen it happen repeatedly throughout Acts. Here these Jews admitted the message was spoken against.

28:23,24 – On the appointed day, Paul taught them about the kingdom. Some believed, but some disbelieved.

Paul and the Jewish leaders chose a day when many of them could come to Paul's lodging and hear what he had to say. He spent the day, from morning till evening, explaining and testifying to them about the kingdom of God, using the Law and prophets as the basis of his evidence.

Note again that it is proper to teach those who are not Christians about the kingdom of God, which is just another term for the relationship of Jesus to the church (see notes on 8:12). It is not true, as some claim, that we should preach just Jesus, but not preach about the church or the duties people have to serve Jesus.

Also, note that Old Testament prophecy is an effective evidence for Jesus and His kingdom. His kingdom exists (Colossians 1:13); Old Testament prophecy does not deny that (as premillennial folks claim), but establishes it.

Further, note the value of teaching in a prearranged home Bible study. This meeting involved setting a time and place at which people met for an investigation of Scripture. Paul earlier said he had taught the gospel from house to house, as well as publicly. We need to do the same (20:20).

The result was that some believed the message and some disbelieved. This is almost always the result the gospel produces. It separates those who have good hearts from those who do not. This happened repeatedly as a result of the preaching recorded in Acts.

Even the best of teachers, such as Paul and Jesus, never converted everyone they taught. The same will be true today. When the truth has been clearly taught in love, we should not blame the teacher when people are not converted. People are responsible to investigate and accept the message with an honest heart. When they reject it, they are responsible. As teachers, we should do our best to persuade people, but if they reject the message we should still realize we have done our part and the result is their responsibility.

28:25-27 – Paul warned them of the danger of rejecting the message as described in Scripture.

The Jews could not agree among themselves. That result always follows when some believe but others disbelieve (see v29).

Since some had rejected the truth, however, Paul had a final admonition. He quoted to them Isaiah 6:9,10, saying that the people would hear and not understand, see and not perceive, because their hearts had grown dull. They closed their eyes lest they see and hear, understand and be converted (see Matthew 13:14f and Jesus' comments there).

Note again that the main reason people do not accept the gospel, when they hear it, is because of the condition of their own hearts. It is not because the gospel is false nor because it cannot be understood, nor because there is a lack of convincing proof. Nor is it usually because the teachers are inadequate. Nor is it, as some claim, because God chose certain people unconditionally from eternity to be saved, and those who reject the gospel are simply not among those who were predestined to be saved. The passage says people reject the truth because they do not want the truth. They have some ulterior motive, prejudice, desire for pleasure,

an unwillingness to sacrifice, or some other hindrance that keeps them from believing.

People who do not believe, of course, will generally not admit that the problem lies within themselves. They will claim the evidence is weak or the presentation was poor or there is sin in the church, etc. But the real root reason people generally do not obey is because of the condition of their own hearts.

28:28,29 – The Jews left arguing among themselves.

Paul concluded by saying that he would teach the Gentiles since the Jews had their opportunity and many were not accepting it. In every city Paul would first give the Jews their chance to hear the truth, then he would teach the Gentiles.

As the Jews left, there was much dispute among them (KJV; compare v25). Division often follows gospel preaching. Note, however, that the people who reject the truth are to blame for this. Those who accept the truth are not responsible for the sin of division.

28:30,31 – Paul continued preaching the kingdom to all who came to him.

The story concludes leaving Paul still a prisoner. Nothing is told of the final outcome of his arrest (though statements in his later epistles imply he may have been released only to be arrested again later). His treatment remained good in that he was allowed to live in a rented house for two years, free to receive all visitors who came to him. He therefore used the opportunity to continue teaching without being forbidden to do so. The message Paul preached, as in v23, included teaching about the kingdom – the church – as well as salvation through Jesus.

Surely it was a great blessing to Paul and to the message of the gospel that he was given this freedom to teach. Many people no doubt heard the truth who otherwise might never have heard it. The whole treatment Paul received was a terrible miscarriage of justice. However, God's people have often suffered for their stand for truth, and we should not necessarily expect justice at the hand of those who are not God's people. Yet, God was able to use the circumstances, despite the wrongs done, as a means to spread his word.

During this time, Paul wrote a number of his epistles, including Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon. These give some understanding of what happened to him during this time. However, the record in the book of Acts itself concludes at this point.

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